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A Marxian Essay

by

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“Psychoanalysis, for all its brilliant and courageous probing into the secret depths of the personality, has never understood that the individual is only a part of the social whole and that the laws of this whole, decomposed and refracted in the apparatus of the individual psyche like rays of light passing through a prism, change and control the nature of each individual.”

RALPH FOX

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CHAPTER I

THEORY AND EXPERIMENT

"THE MOST CHALLENGING social science problem of our time," writes Professor J. F. Brown, "lies in the antithesis between Freudian psychoanalysis and Marxian sociology. . . ."¹

Unquestionably there is an antithesis between Marx and Freud. A number of excellent Marxists, indeed, are unable to see anything else. Mark Graubard, for example, believes that Freud's popularity "is nothing but an indictment of our present educational system and loose philosophical reasoning".² T. A. Jackson, although he appears to admit the validity of Freud's empirical findings, throws this concession into such a howling mass of ridicule and invective that it is difficult to see how much importance he attributes to these findings.³ Both critics make clear their belief that the question of the relation between Marx and Freud can be raised only by those who wish to dilute, or rather pollute, Marxism with phantasy and verbiage.

Although no such intention can be imputed to Reuben Osborn who attempts to show that Marx and Freud can be laid side by side unchanged,⁴ or to John Strachey who gives a cautious blessing to this attempt, I think this essay will demonstrate that such "reconciliations" can only end in unacceptable revisions of Marxism.

On the other hand, the antithesis between Marx and Freud could present no real challenge if Freud's work

¹ J. F. Brown, *The Nation*, July 3, 1937, p. 21.

² M. Graubard, *Biology and Human Behaviour*, p. 315.

³ T. A. Jackson, *Dialectics* (Lawrence & Wishart).

⁴ R. Osborn, *Freud and Marx* (Victor Gollancz). In fairness to Strachey it must be said that he was more pleased that the question had been seriously raised than satisfied with Osborn's answer.

were not of the highest importance. If Freud had nothing better to offer than an elaborate home-spun mythology, we should be justified in dismissing him, as Graubard does, for "ignorance and irresponsibility".¹ No doubt many Marxists believe that these epithets are correctly applied. It is therefore necessary for us to begin by showing that Freud does not merit the same contempt from Marxists that he endured for so many years from Victorian philistines.

The spearhead of serious criticism against Freud, coming from many directions, is the complaint that his theories are not based upon experimental evidence. The experiments cited by Freud are few and not at all decisive. And the attempt to base general theories upon clinical material alone has seemed unacceptable to a great many scientists.² If no experiments indicating the validity of psychoanalytic hypotheses were forthcoming, we might, though not necessarily, begin to question its scientific character. But to maintain that psychoanalysis should have been based from the beginning upon experiment and to reject its claims as pure phantasy because it was not, is to misunderstand both the historical development of psychology and the nature of experiment.

In the late nineteenth century the only successful methods of advancing the understanding of "physiological psychology" were experimental. But when the complex problems of personality, will and emotion were attacked in the laboratory, the results were discouraging. Nothing but a fruitless collection of unrelated facts "gave rise among psychologists to feelings of diffidence and despair".³ Most psychologists attributed the failure to the inherent impossibility of studying human behaviour in the laboratory. "Prior to Freud," says Wheeler, "investigations of feeling and emotion had resulted in little if any progress because

¹ M. Graubard, *Biology and Human Behaviour*, p. 315.

² See J. F. Brown, "Freud and the Scientific Method," in *Philosophy of Science*, 1934, 1, p. 323.

³ G. Murphy, *Historical Introduction to Modern Psychology* (K. Paul).

the individual was being studied in artificial laboratory situations."¹

Wheeler's implication appears to be that the complex problems of human psychology will never be amenable to experimental investigation. This is not the case. What may properly be called the left wing of the Gestalt school, which is "thoroughly dialectic" and "methodologically extremely fertile",² is now beginning to approach in the laboratory the problems of will, needs and personality. "Within recent years," says Kurt Lewin, "a great number of studies have shown that in spite of the general scepticism an experimental attack on fundamental problems in those fields, including problems of Freudian psychology, is quite possible."³

An experiment is a very specialized mode of activity. Its success "depends upon the possibility of isolating the distinct factors and treating separately the influence of each experimental variable upon the phenomenon whose nature is under consideration".⁴ It requires, then, that the relevant factors be known to exist. How, for example, is one to conduct in the laboratory an investigation into the dynamics of unconscious complexes if one does not even know that such complexes exist? Further, the necessary control over each of the relevant factors requires a fairly accurate knowledge, at least, of the nature of these factors. How is one to create artificially an unconscious complex if the general nature of such complexes is still a mystery?

In short, fruitful experimentation demands a previously well-developed theory. Every experiment should begin with a guiding hypothesis which is to be thoroughly tested. In most cases, as Jackson says, the experimenter "has in

¹ Wheeler, *The Science of Psychology*, p. 10.

² Kornilov, see Murchison, *Psychologies of 1930* (Oxford University Press). On this point J. F. Brown's comparison of Marxism with "Field Theory" is pertinent; see *Psychology and the Social Order* (McGraw).

³ K. Lewin, *Topological Psychology* (McGraw).

⁴ Murphy, *op. cit.*

mind an expectation that the result will be of a particular kind".¹

It is clear that the early failure to solve, in the laboratory, any of the complex problems of the person was not due to the "artificiality" of experimental situations *per se*, but because these early investigators lacked an adequate theoretical guide. They did not even know what the problems were. More and more psychologists are recognizing the validity of the Marxian emphasis upon the importance of theory. "A science without theory," says Lewin, in words which remind one of a famous expression of Stalin's, "is blind because it lacks that element which alone is able to organize facts and to give direction to research."²

Experimentation is a specialized form of practice which cannot hope to be fruitful without the previous development of theory under less exacting conditions. The psychology dealing with the problems of personality did not, therefore, arise out of the laboratory. It came and it could only come from clinical work. "The only approach to deeper problems," says Lewin, "was the brilliant work of Freud."³ It is to him that leading Gestaltists are looking for guidance in experiments dealing with these deeper problems. The criticism against Freudianism is not that it did not develop upon the basis of experiment, but that even now it is not sufficiently developed to permit adequate experimental situations to be formulated.⁴ Even this criticism is not entirely valid. The experiments conducted by Luria at the State Institute of Experimental Psychology in Moscow, some of which we shall presently review, depend upon a whole series of discoveries and theoretical advances in which Freud played a major part.

Freud's theories did not spring full-blown out of his fantastic brain, nor were they, as Jackson might lead us

¹ Jackson, *Dialectics*.

² K. Lewin, *Topological Psychology*.

³ Ibid.

⁴ J. F. Brown, "Freud and the Scientific Method," *Philosophy of Science*, 1934, 1, p. 323.

to suppose, snipped from the pages of Schopenhauer and von Hartmann. They grew out of the arduous task of attempting to do something for neurotics and have developed and been revised according to the demands of continuous therapeutic practice.

In 1882, when the necessity of making a living forced Freud to abandon the physiological laboratory and to enter the General Hospital in Vienna as a "cadet", doctors had only begun to approach the problem of the neuroses. Indeed, they had only begun to discover that there was any problem of neuroses at all. People suffering, for example, from hysteria were often treated with the utmost contempt by the many doctors they were obliged to visit. A limb, paralyzed for no observable organic reason; an eye, the only defect of which was that it could not see; such things as these were still widely thought to be impossible. Those who persisted in complaining of such symptoms, in the face of the most authoritative assertions that they were perfectly well, were regarded as malingerers or inexplicably stubborn fakers.

Physicians who were gullible enough to treat these neurotic ailments seriously, shared the disdain. This had been particularly true of those few heroic individuals who were employing hypnosis with results not altogether unsuccessful. It was only in 1882 that Bernheim brought Liébault into prominence and hypnotism began to attain some degree of respectability. Previous to this, hypnotism had been synonymous with quackery. "The good father Liébault", as he was called by his multitudes of poor patients, never accepted a fee for hypnotic treatment, "lest he should be regarded as attempting to make money by unrecognized methods".¹

Yet hypnotic suggestion was the only one of many unsatisfactory techniques which could claim some justification, however fragmentary, of theory. The physical methods, such as electrotherapy, were blind thrusts in the dark, and, as Freud himself discovered, discouragingly ineffec-

¹ Bramwell, *Hypnotism*, p. 33.

tive. On the other hand, Charcot's demonstration that hysterical paralyses are due, not to organic cortical lesions but to "functional lesions" as he called them, lent support to the hypnotic techniques. By suggesting to a patient under hypnosis the idea that his arm, for example, was paralyzed, Charcot had been able to create artificially this familiar hysterical symptom.¹ "He succeeded," says Freud, "in producing a faultless demonstration and proved thereby that these paralyses were the result of specific ideas holding sway in the brain of the patient at moments of special disposition."²

If the symptoms were caused by "pathogenic ideas" and could be reproduced by hypnotic suggestion, there was reason to believe that counter-ideas introduced under hypnosis might be strong enough to restrain the pathogenic ideas from coming to expression. The hypnotic technique, therefore, proceeded to administer prohibitions in the expectation that the patient, becoming convinced of the falsity of his belief in his symptoms, would also become cured. To Freud, the technique which he "learned from Liébault's and Bernheim's highly impressive demonstrations, then seemed to offer a satisfactory substitute for the failure of electrical treatment".³

Although the technique many times brought temporary relief, it was soon obvious that a satisfactory therapy had not been found. Freud "despaired of making suggestion powerful and enduring enough to effect permanent cures. In all severe cases," he says, "I saw the suggestions which had been applied crumble away again; and then the disease or some substitute for it returned".⁴

Clearly, hypnotic suggestion was inadequate. It did not even pretend to *remove* the pathogenic ideas causing the disease, but only to restrain them; and it did nothing to advance the knowledge of the nature of these pathogenic

¹ Charcot's subjects were already hysterics. He believed that only they could be hypnotized.

² *Collected Papers* (Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psychoanalysis).

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.*

ideas. The question blocking further progress was: what is the nature of the "specific ideas holding sway in the brain of the patient" and by what technique can they be deposed or entirely removed? Fortunately, this question had been partially answered some years previously by Dr. Breuer with whom Freud now entered into more permanent association.

If an hysterical patient be asked what is the idea holding sway in his brain which produces his symptoms, he is unable to answer. And no amount of ordinary questioning will be able to assist him. Breuer had discovered, however, that under hypnosis a "widening of consciousness" seemed to occur which permitted the patient to recall many experiences which were not available to him in a normal state. Under these conditions, Freud and Breuer found that if they could make the patient revert back to the psychic state in which the symptom had appeared for the first time, "there came up in the hypnotized patient's mind memories, thoughts and impulses which had previously dropped out of his consciousness. . . ."¹ And the connection between these recollections and the symptoms was revealed "in the clearest and most convincing manner".² For as soon as the patient had related the reminiscences, "accompanying this expression with intense emotion, the symptom was overcome and its return done away with".³

The "cathartic method", as it was called, permitted a partial answer to the twofold question. As to the nature of the pathogenic ideas, it showed that they were not simply the patient's inexplicable belief in his own symptoms. They were reminiscences. But paradoxically, they were reminiscences which could not ordinarily be remembered. As Freud wrote, ". . . these recollections are not at the disposal of the patient in the way that his more commonplace memories are. On the contrary, when the patient is in his usual psychical condition these experiences are completely absent from his memory or are present to it

¹ *Collected Papers.*

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*

only in the most summary manner. Only when patients are questioned under hypnosis do these memories recur with the undiminished vividness of recent events".¹

To the question, how can these pathogenic ideas be removed from power, the technique answered, by assisting the patient to remember and to re-live the experiences connected with the symptoms. This it was able to do and as Freud reported to the world at the time, the cathartic method "far surpasses the effect of removal by direct suggestion which is now practised by psychotherapists".²

Freud's experience with this technique led to the most important theoretical conclusions, the simple observation of the process of cure showed that experiences in the patient's past, which he cannot ordinarily remember, are nevertheless capable of producing effects. He suffers from reminiscences which he cannot remember. But this is only to say that there exist unconscious mental processes. "We have found," says Freud, "that is, we have been obliged to assume that very powerful mental processes or ideas exist . . . which can produce in the mind all the effects that ordinary ideas do . . . without themselves becoming conscious."³ This is the meaning of the term "the unconscious". It refers to ideas and impulses which have been excluded from consciousness, but which are nevertheless active. It designates that complex of "ideas keeping apart from consciousness in spite of their intensity and activity".⁴

It had been observed at the same time that the symptoms were derived from the unconscious. "With Breuer," says Freud, "I maintain the following: Every time we meet with a symptom we may conclude that definite unconscious activities which contain the meaning of the symptom are

¹ *Collected Papers*, Vol. I, p. 31-2.

² *Ibid.*, p. 41.

³ *Ego and Id* (Hogarth Press).

⁴ *Collected Papers*. As Freud's experience deepened, the term "unconscious" took on a more specialized meaning as well as retaining its original one. This led to great confusion until the differentiated "nucleus of the unconscious" was given a separate name, the "id". The term "unconscious" is now reserved for the single concept here described.

present in the patient's mind. Conversely, this meaning must be unconscious before a symptom can arise from it. Symptoms are not produced by conscious processes; as soon as the unconscious processes involved are made conscious the symptoms must vanish."¹ And, he adds, "Breuer's discovery still remains the foundation of psychoanalytic therapy".

It may now reasonably be asked why such ideas, which have the energy and dynamic character sufficient to produce results, do not become conscious. This, in fact, was precisely the question Freud asked himself while working with the cathartic method. Since the experiences uncovered were such as must have been accompanied by fright, shame or psychical pain, it might have been assumed that the person refused the experience admission to consciousness in order to avoid a revival of these distressing affects. At least it would seem safe to say that ". . . such ideas cannot become conscious because a certain force is opposed to them. . . ." ²

The cathartic method, however, provided no insight into the nature of the opposing force. In the normal psychic state, the opposing force prevailed almost entirely and the very existence of unconscious ideas could hardly be suspected. Under hypnosis the reverse was true. The patient showed little hesitation in speaking out, and the opposing, repressing force seemed to be in abeyance. Thus, this method failed to expose the conflict between the unconscious ideas and the force which kept them unconscious.

It was not primarily this theoretical difficulty which impelled Freud to cast about for still another technique. It was a practical one. The cathartic method presupposed that the patient could be hypnotized. But not all patients could be hypnotized; for them at least, it was certainly necessary to proceed in a different fashion. At first Freud attempted to reach the unconscious by simply questioning, coaxing and prodding his patients to remember while they

¹ *General Introduction to Psychoanalysis* (Hogarth Press).

² *Ego and Id.*

were in a normal state. But the widening of consciousness, characteristic of hypnosis and so essential to reaching the unconscious material, was absent. It was necessary somehow to attain a widening of consciousness without benefit of hypnosis. And it was the necessity of overcoming this obstacle which led directly to the development of the psychoanalytic technique.

In the course of our thinking, a thousand and one ideas occur to us to which we pay no attention since they appear irrelevant and would, if allowed, interfere with the clear course of our thought. Others are pushed aside as distasteful in one way or another. So habitual does this process become that we are hardly ever aware of it. But the fact is that we actually narrow the scope of our consciousness by failing or refusing to entertain a vast number of thoughts which do come to us. Now Freud simply insisted that his patients communicate to him all of these usually rejected ideas. He found that consciousness actually was able, without the assistance of hypnosis, to approach, if only hesitantly and with the greatest pain and effort, ideas and memories which had previously been reached only under hypnosis. He thus dispensed with the necessity of hypnotizing his patients, while at the same time, he attained that widening of consciousness which was necessary to reach the pathogenic ideas.

The assistance rendered by this technical change to the development of theory was of the utmost importance. While the method succeeded in bringing the unconscious ideas into consciousness, it did so only against the resistance of the opposing forces. The unconscious forces and the opposing resisting forces were no longer separated. They appeared at the same time in struggle against each other, a conflict which expressed itself in the patient's difficulties, the checks in the free flow of his associations, the strange gaps in memory and the inaccuracies later corrected. The conflicting nature of the cure was a matter of observation. ". . . The problem," wrote Freud, "consists in making the unconscious accessible to consciousness, which is done

by overcoming the resistances.”¹ It became clear that the unconscious ideas and impulses, which are really a part of the personality, become and remain unconscious because they are incompatible with the rest of the personality. They are repressed as an economical measure to prevent the personality from suffering the pain of continual conscious conflict. And that part of the self which is responsible for the original repression must maintain its resistance against the efforts of the excluded ideas to re-enter consciousness. “The doctrine of repression,” says Freud, “is the foundation stone on which the whole structure of psychoanalysis rests, the most essential part of it, and yet it is nothing but a theoretical formulation of a phenomenon which may be observed to recur as often as one undertakes an analysis of a neurotic without resorting to hypnosis.”²

The free-association method which led to this theoretical advance depends upon an assumption. We are apt to suppose these associations to be purely haphazard and meaningless and to doubt if this stream of consciousness is a dependable route to the depths of the unconscious. Freud, however, did not believe that a patient's chains of thought were a matter of chance. “We start,” he said frankly, “with an assumption . . . that his thoughts are not arbitrary but are determined by their reaction to his secret complexes, and may be regarded to a certain extent as derived from these complexes.”³

When Bleuler and Jung applied this assumption to the word-association test of Wundt, they built, says Freud, “the first bridge between experimental psychology and psychoanalysis”.⁴

The association test is a simple variant of the children's game in which one child calls out a word to which a second child must respond immediately with another word. In giving a list of word-stimuli to a subject, Jung

¹ *Collected Papers.*

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *General Introduction to Psychoanalysis.*

assumed that the response would be conditioned, not alone by the stimulus itself, but by a pre-existing group of ideas in the mind of the subject of which he was at the moment unaware. These unconscious "circles of thoughts and interests of strong affective value"¹ are called complexes.

The subject's responses to Jung's carefully chosen list of word-stimuli were often retarded many seconds, or the response word was particularly unusual, as if the response to the stimulus-word "moon" should be "patagium". When these indications and others occurred, and the subject was questioned further concerning the reason for his irregularity, some of his unconscious complexes might be brought to light. This experimental procedure, guided by Freudian hypotheses, made it possible to demonstrate quickly certain connections between complexes and symptoms which previously could have been learned only from the reports of practising analysts. And it was able in a more controlled fashion than a full psychoanalysis to demonstrate some of the dynamics of unconscious processes. The resistance, for example, which a subject shows to making conscious an unconscious complex, could be exhibited by the alteration of his response to a particular stimulus-word in two successive tests. In the first trial, his response to "moon" might be, after some delay, "patagium", while in the second trial it would be changed to "June".

It is obvious that the experiment is not by any means decisive in demonstrating the truth of psychoanalytic contentions. This deficiency is due to the lack of control exerted by the experiment over two main factors. First, although the interim between stimulus and response is timed, there is no means of discovering objectively the subject's inner response during this time. And second, the complexes themselves, being natural ones, unknown both to the subject and the experimenter, are also out of control. The very existence of any complex must still be inferred

¹ *General Introduction to Psychoanalysis.*

from the nature of the response, and what kind of complex it is can only be determined by further investigation after the experiment is over. Quite clearly, one requirement of a decisive experiment is control over the complex and this can only be achieved by the production in the subject of an artificial complex known in advance to the experimenter.

It will be recalled that Charcot succeeded in creating artificial symptoms by means of hypnosis. He produced them by convincing the subject of their existence. But the true nature of "pathogenic ideas" was not known to him. It was Breuer and Freud who discovered that they consisted of forgotten, yet active reminiscences. Charcot produced *symptoms* without producing *complexes* strictly speaking. The task of the experimenter who wishes to create an unconscious complex is to create artificially in the mind of the subject a forgotten, but deeply moving, emotional experience!

A. Luria¹ accomplished this apparently impossible feat quite simply by a somewhat different use of hypnotic suggestion. To a subject under hypnosis it is suggested that he is performing an activity which has some emotional significance for him, in that it is opposed to the conscious desires of his personality. For example, it is suggested to a young girl medical student that a woman has come to her requesting that she perform an abortion. The student knows that abortions are prohibited and she protests. The woman, however, as the hypnotist suggests, explains that she absolutely must have the abortion; it is very important to her; she appeals to the student's sympathies. The student under hypnosis protests that she will not perform the operation, but the hypnotist insists. He tells her that she has already agreed and the woman has gone away. The operation is described. The student is told that she is in the midst of it when something goes wrong. There is a haemorrhage; blood is on the floor.

¹ See *The Nature of Human Conflicts*. Based on experiments conducted in Moscow during the period, 1923-30.

It is not difficult to tell that the suggestion is taking effect, for the subject shows great agitation and responds with the emotions appropriate to the conflicting situation. When aroused, however, the subject cannot recall anything of the suggestion. "The situation suggested by us becomes distinctly affective. Therefore, it is even more interesting that the person under test entirely forgets the suggestion after awakening and that only a few signs, like a heavy feeling, a general anxiousness, etc. remain as symptoms of the fact that in the subject's past there is concealed some severe trauma."¹ The subject is "charged" with an artificial complex!

The experiment, however, does not begin with the construction of a complex. It begins with a word-association test, given while the subject is still in a normal state. Among the stimulus-words are included a number which are purposely connected with the complex which will be hypnotically implanted. In the case above, for example, words like "scalpel", "blood", etc., are interspersed with the neutral words.

Whether the response to all these words is neutral, or has been interfered with in some way, can be told, not only from the time taken for the response and the content of the response, as in Jung's experiments, but also by the use of the "combined motor method", a way of detecting some of the activities which occur in the subject between stimulus and response. At the very instant of response, the subject must deliberately press a bulb with the fingers of his right hand, a motion which is recorded as a curve on a chart. Normally, the curve is clear-cut and regular, occurring simultaneously with the word-response. If there is any emotional disturbance, the curve becomes stronger, irregular or rises and falls before and after the word-response. The left hand is supposed to remain passive, but any "overflow" of excitation, causing involuntary tremors of this hand, are recorded parallel with the voluntary movements of the right hand.

The subject responds to the first trial in a neutral fashion, showing that none of the words chosen strikes a

¹ Luria, *The Nature of Human Conflicts*, p. 193.

disturbing emotional complex. He is then hypnotized, charged with an artificial complex and after being awakened, is given the same test again. The results are quite different.

"Every time," writes Luria, "the subject responds to the words connected with the complex with distinct retardation (in time) and shows a curve of pressure reaching almost to the limit. It is remarkable that the subject gives these symptoms without any suspicion of the complex suggested and only by the end of the experiment begins to remember the 'dream' suggested to him."¹

The conclusion which Luria draws is that there can exist mental processes which are unconscious and at the same time active. "A strong emotion is hidden here in the past and is concealed not only from the experimenter but also from the personality itself; it is removed from consciousness, though apparently it is still active."²

The subject is re-hypnotized and the suggestion countermanded. He is then given the same test a third time. The abnormal reactions have disappeared.

The further development of the experiment is still more instructive. Before the hypnotic suggestion has been countermanded and the complex removed, the subject is requested to make a word-chain without the interposition of stimulus-words. He may say, for instance, boat—sea—blue—man—hat—etc.—etc., at each word pressing the bulb. This chain association more closely approaches the psychoanalytic technique than the single word-response, but at the same time, it remains under control. It is, in fact, precisely what Luria calls it: an "experimental psychoanalysis".³

We will recall that Freud was led to assume that the free-associations of his patients were determined and in part derived from their secret complexes, that they therefore expose these complexes and that significant past experiences which have been forgotten are thereby unintentionally

¹ Luria, *op. cit.*, p. 142.

² *Ibid.*, p. 133.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 150.

reconstructed in the course of the treatment. This assumption is of the highest importance since these free-associations constitute the main source of Freud's information concerning the significant repressed experiences of a person's past.

On a smaller scale, and with the complex under control, Luria found precisely the same thing. Since he knew the entire complex in advance, he could be positive which words in the chain-association were connected with it and could observe more accurately the nature of the disturbances accompanying these words. He found that "the subject reconstructs quite unintentionally the (suggested) situation, . . . not knowing why that situation has come to her mind and not being able to explain its contents".¹

The conclusion which he draws is identical with Freud's assumption. "The affective complex constructed by us, though not yet being conscious, creates an affective state and determines the flow of the free associative series."²

Once the subject has reconstructed the situation and finally and suddenly remembered the "experience", the further associations of the chain-series proceed without interference, showing that the symptoms are derived from unconscious, not from conscious processes.

We now return to the question which Freud has already answered; why do certain experiences become and remain unconscious in spite of the energy connected with them? Freud's answer is that these affective experiences are repressed from consciousness because they are incompatible with the ego. The aim is economic; it preserves the personality from the pain of conscious conflict. And this aim is brought about in a threefold way. Repression "is responsible, not merely when something is withheld from consciousness, but also when affective development and the inauguration of muscular activity is prevented."³

Luria describes the process of repression in much the same way. "The affect," he says, "begins when some-

¹ Luria, *op. cit.*, p. 155. ² *Ibid.*, p. 157. ³ *Collected Papers*.

thing happens to human activity.”¹ There are two basic means at the disposal of the “strategic personality” for disposing of this blocked tension. First, it may be possible to give it some outlet. If not, the person will “attempt to suppress the manifestation of the affect”² and to remove it from the possibility of action. “The insulation of affective traces from the consciousness simultaneously produces the insulation from the motor area, transforming the active affect into one which is concealed or potential.”³

What is the function of repression? It “seems”, says Luria, “to be the mechanism which saves the personality from the over-excitement and from the disorganization connected with an open appearance of the conflict. In that respect the construction of a certain functional barrier between the affective centre and the motor area is of decisive importance for the conservation in the personality of the possibility to act normally without disorganizing its behaviour by the affective traces existing in its past in considerable numbers”.⁴

The “functional barrier” manifests itself as resistance to the cure. “The reaction (of the complex) is always connected with the breaking of the barrier which separates the affect from the motor area, and with the corresponding switching over of the innervation to the motor area.”⁵ Thus the process of making an unconscious complex conscious is, as Freud has maintained, “not a simple and quiet process, but an acute conflicting act which is reflected in the structure of the chain links”⁶ Once the functional barrier has been broken down and the resistance overcome, the chain associations are no longer interfered with; “. . . the subject is able to pass into a considerably more stable chain of neutral reactions than he had before”.⁷

¹ Luria, *op. cit.*, p. 149.

² *Ibid.*, p. 193.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 154.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 160.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 159.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 161.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 159.

"It so happens," says Mark Graubard, "that reality supports none of the numerous generalizations Freud makes."¹

These Marxist experiments confirm almost word for word the three main assumptions upon which the entire mass of psychoanalytic observations depends. They confirm the fact that unconscious and active mental processes do exist; that these processes remain unconscious due to an economic mechanism of repression which manifests itself as resistance in the conflicting nature of the cure; and finally, that the free flow of associations is determined and in part derived from the subject's secret complexes.

Basing their technique upon these premises, psychoanalysts have for some years now been listening to the free associations of their patients, helping them to reconstruct their complexes in consciousness and very often thereby succeeding in bringing about those more stable reactions to which Luria refers. Considering these circumstances and the degree of agreement on essentials, it is highly probable that the observations made by psychoanalysts are substantially correct. They will unquestionably be subject to further revision and augmentation, but such changes can come about only through special and arduous investigations, whether in the clinic, the laboratory or the nursery. The correctness or incorrectness of Freudian observations cannot be determined by the simple application of methodological principles. It cannot, for instance, be deduced from the general laws of dialectics that the oedipus complex is a myth.

It does not follow from this that Marxism and Freudianism can be "reconciled" in the sense that Osborn has advocated. It is an illusion that Marxists can take over the Freudian theory intact, that Freudians can become Marxists without revising their views, that Freud and Marx can be *added* together to form a "dialectical unity". Psychoanalysis, as a theoretical system, is unquestionably at odds with Marxism. This fact need not come as a

¹ Graubard, *Biology and Human Behavior*, p. 315.

surprise, since Marxism is the theory and practice of the revolutionary proletariat and Freudianism was developed in the shell of the mechanical materialism of the nineteenth-century bourgeoisie. The two viewpoints are as irreconcilable as the proletariat and the bourgeoisie. Just as the technical achievements of the bourgeoisie can be further developed only if the social relations in which they grew are overcome by the proletariat, so the scientific achievements of Freud can be further developed only if the theoretical structure in which *they* grew is overcome by revolutionary criticism.

Yet, since the rest of this essay is mainly concerned with demonstrating those limitations which Freud shares with other bourgeois thinkers, it was necessary to insist upon the essential value of his contributions so that they should not be left for long to writhe in a tangle of theoretical errors.

CHAPTER II

THE ISOLATED INDIVIDUAL

"THE WELTANSCHAUUNG OF about 1875," writes Fritz Wittels, "holds Freud, the great revolutionary and preparer of the future, in its fangs. . . ." ¹

But what was the world-view of about 1875? Herbert Spencer's soothing doctrine that society evolves by the mechanical addition of hardly perceptible changes comforted the middle classes as much as Marx's revolutionary outlook scandalized them. The marginal utilitarians, who began about this time to demonstrate the theoretical perfection and permanence of capitalism, cannot be supposed to have viewed the world in the same light as the Marxists.

World-views depend not only upon the date or period of the society in which they are formulated, but differ also according to the various classes within that society. Marxists therefore distinguish between two main groups of world-views in capitalist society, corresponding to its two essential opposing classes, bourgeois and proletarian. What holds Freud in its fangs is not the dialectical materialism of the proletariat, but the melancholy mechanism of the nineteenth-century bourgeoisie.

When Marxists apply the term "bourgeois" to a theorist, they do not or should not intend thereby to dispose of him. The category "bourgeois" is not necessarily a crematory. It is the correct term by which to designate a thinker whose point of view is essentially the same as that of an active practising capitalist.

Since 1932, it has not seemed so staggering as it once did to suggest that the views of scientists and artists are

¹ Fritz Wittels, *Freud and His Time*, p. 77.

given their direction by the dominance in our society of the utterly unaesthetic and untheoretical businessman. Yet it is still necessary, if not so difficult, to demonstrate that the individual capitalist sees the world through a prism which distorts his view in certain determinate ways; and further, that those thinkers whom we call bourgeois have never, even in their most abstract theorizing, been wholly able to escape the consequences of this defective vision.

Since these aberrations blur the work of Freud and are largely responsible for his important theoretical errors, it is obligatory that we first examine them in their original form in the world of business.

The activity of the individual capitalist depends upon the previous existence of a complex system of practical human relations which are independent of his will. It was Marx who first demonstrated this fact, at the same time showing why, to the unsuspecting eye of the bourgeois, these relations are veiled in an impenetrable mystery.

A capitalist requires access to a free-labour market. There must exist, as a prerequisite to his production, a number of individuals who own no machines or other means of production of their own and who are therefore compelled by economic necessity to work for others who do own them. These workers cannot be slaves for they must be free to enter into voluntary contractual relations with various employers at different times. They cannot be serfs, for they must not be attached to the soil, but free to move from one place to another as the needs of production require. They must be at liberty to come to the cities, the centres of industry. In a word, they must be free wage-earners. The individual capitalist takes their existence for granted without considering that such a labour-market was produced only in the course of a long historical development and is not characteristic of any other form of society.

The rugged individualist requires also the existence of a commodity-market of which the labour-market is only

a part. He must be assured, as the condition of his production, that other individuals in society are likewise producing goods for sale and are ready to buy his commodities. If there is no possibility of placing his goods upon a market which will absorb them, he will not produce. In a depression, when the market, independently of any individual will, "crashes", a number of capitalists cease production altogether.

The individual capitalist therefore is only a part of a system of economic relations which did not exist under feudalism, does not exist in the Soviet Union, and will one day be everywhere destroyed. The capitalist is the product of these relations. He is an historical creature. He came into being at a particular period of social evolution and will disappear from the scene along with the disappearance of the historical system to which he belongs. But he, himself, does not realize this. "Few tricks of the unsophisticated intellect," says Tawney, "are more curious than the naïve psychology of the businessman who ascribes his achievements to his own unaided efforts, in bland unconsciousness of a social order without whose continuous support and vigilant protection he would be as a lamb bleating in the desert."¹

However curious, the attitude is not inexplicable. The productive activity of each single individual in society is only a definite part of the total productive activity of society. Where the contribution of each individual to the total social labour is part of a conscious plan, as in the Soviet Union, or where the working relations of the individuals correspond with their personal relations, as under feudalism, the connection between the labour of one individual and that of the rest is perfectly clear. Each individual perceives that he is only a part of a system of practical relations. He sees that he is dependent upon others, that he is working for others and that they are working for him. No one appears to himself to be independent. There are no "isolated" men.

¹ Tawney, *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism* (Murray).

Under capitalism, however, production is anarchic. Individual producers are not made conscious of their mutual connection by a rational plan, nor are they connected with each other personally. There are no well-defined duties, obligations or loyalties. The labour of each individual is connected with that of all the rest only through the medium of an impersonal market. Each appears to be producing, not for others, but for this anonymous market. The independently produced goods are used by others, of course, but this is not why the individual capitalist produces them. He is not producing them for the use of others, but for his own profit.

The particular production relations which make him produce as a capitalist rather than as a slave-owner, for instance, do not appear on the surface during the actual production of the commodities. Here, he appears to be independent of any other producers. His real relations appear only *after* the goods have been produced and are placed upon the market for exchange. The very existence of this mass exchange of commodities betrays to us the fact that his productive activity was not independent of that of others, but existed only as a part of the total social activity. But even at the moment of exchange this is not clear to the bourgeois. Personally he is still quite independent of others. In any case, he is not obligated to them in any way, and he concentrates his attention upon his products, particularly with regard to the price which they will bring. His relation to society remains anonymous. His products, however, are not independent of other products. These must be and are exchanged. Therefore what are really his social relations appear only as a relation between things.¹

The bourgeois therefore suffers from a blind-spot which conceals from him the fact that his very existence and the nature of his productive activities depend upon pre-existing, involuntary and continuous social relations. The only economic relations which present themselves clearly to

¹ See Marx, *Capital* (Allen & Unwin).

him are those transitory and voluntary connections which he himself establishes through contracts. His society therefore appears to him to be no more than the sum total of a number of profit-seeking individuals who, through the medium of contract, produce the social relations.

It is easy to see that the bourgeois takes the existence of capitalists for granted. In his eyes, they are not the gift of historical development but of nature, existing from the beginning, in the primeval forest and in modern cities. He observes the behaviour of these individuals under certain definite conditions, but instead of ascribing the behaviour to the conditions, he ascribes it to the nature of "man". Thus, the process of the accumulation of capital is referred to not the social relations between men, but to the men themselves. It is referred to an "instinct for accumulation". To the question, why do these people accumulate capital, the answer is given, not that the social relations require it, but that it is in the nature of man to accumulate capital.

Early in the history of capitalism, the view of the independent commodity producer was transported intact into the more abstract theory of the social contract. Here we seem to have forgotten the actual burgher and his business relations and appear to be concerned only with "man" and his social relations in general. The social contract theorists accordingly begin their exposition, not with a number of independent capitalists, but with a number of isolated "natural men" unconnected by any permanent ties. It was their task, as they saw it, to elucidate the qualities possessed by these isolated individuals, to show how these qualities would lead the lonely men to enter into contractual relations with each other, and finally, to deduce from the nature of the individuals the nature of the society formed by their union.

The social contract theory, in its original form, has long since been discredited. But it must not be supposed that it dropped out of existence at the end of the eighteenth century. The assumptions and implications of the social

contract are as inescapable as the bourgeois viewpoint itself. An isolated man wanders through the wilderness of every bourgeois mentality. He has changed his name and indeed his whole character as the bourgeoisie itself changed, but always he is independent of any necessary social relations. The noble savage of Rousseau, the "economic man" of the classical economists, the "economic subject" of Boehm Bawerk, the "farmer isolated from all the world" or the "inhabitant of the forest primeval" who forms the starting point of other marginal utilitarian economists¹; each of these and one other whom we shall have occasion presently to meet is an isolated man. It is from the characteristics of some such individual that we are to deduce the nature of society. Social institutions are to be accounted for by reference to the desires and impulses of a "natural" man.

But how does the isolated individual come to possess the particular characteristic ascribed to him? He does not derive these characteristics from social life, for he is independent of social life, the precondition of society. He is what he is "by nature". Equipped with various instincts and abilities, he is accepted as something given. Hobbes believes man to be motivated by competitiveness, vanity and self-defence; Rousseau thought him blessed with self-love and sympathy; both were agreed, however, that whatever his particular passions, the natural man was natural, that is to say, his properties were determined "in the nature of man". Whether endowed with an instinct to truck and barter, or with an urge to invent and to imitate the inventions of others, the isolated man possesses his qualities by virtue of the single fact that he belongs to the species homo. These qualities belong to him whatever the social conditions: they would be the same were he to grow up in the forest primeval. Human nature never changes, at least in its essential respects. The only condition of its existence is that its possessor be a human being.

¹ N. Bukharin, *The Economic Theory of the Leisure Class* (Laurence & Wishart).

Whether the development of the individual in a particular way is thought to be due to the unfolding of an "ideal conception" planted in him by God, as John S. Mill believed¹ or to the working out of an hereditary schedule, independent of the social milieu, we may be sure that once again we are face to face with the natural man of the social contract.

The human infant, Freud believes, develops through a number of stages, the main lines of which are predetermined by heredity, and which act relatively independently of the environment. "It seems to be phylogenetically established," he says, "in what sequence the individual impulsive feelings become active and how long they can manifest themselves before they succumb to the influence of a newly appearing impulse or to a typical repression."² Thus the essential development of the individual is determined not in a social milieu, but almost exclusively from within. Only later does the social milieu impose itself upon the predestined impulses. The natural man is always with us whatever the social influences. And we shall greet him unhesitatingly when he reappears in Freud as the "ineradicable animal nature" of man, alias the Id.

Presuming that the natural man develops his essential qualities previous to his entrance into society, does it necessarily follow that he will remain entirely unaffected by social life? On the contrary. The concept of the natural man does not at all exclude the possibility of environmental effects. It was precisely society which, according to Rousseau, had corrupted and degraded the natural man. Men as they actually existed, he thought, were unquestionably evil, but all the same, they were *naturally* good. This was not to say that the natural man had been eradicated. He still existed, but the evil effects of society had so overlaid his real nature that it was difficult to distinguish between his fundamental characteristics as given

¹ J. S. Mill, *On Liberty*, p. 120 (Dent).

² *Three Contributions to the Theory of Sex*, p. 96.

by nature, and those superficial corruptions which had been introduced by social life.

Yet however difficult it was in reality to distinguish between the natural man and the social man, such a distinction, thought Rousseau, was necessary in theory. It was in fact one of his main problems to penetrate below the superficial forms of behaviour arising from custom and the exigencies of society to the true natural man beneath. How can man, asked Rousseau, "distinguish what is fundamental in his nature from the changes and additions which his circumstances and the advances he has made have introduced to modify his primitive condition?"¹

In its proper place, we shall consider the answer which Freud gives to this question. But first it is necessary to ask ourselves a somewhat different question. If those things which are "fundamental" in man's nature are independent of social conditions, what kind of effects can we expect social life to have upon each individual? In other words, what are the ways in which the social environment can affect the individual without at the same time altering his fundamental nature?

If we believe with Mill that the nature of man is determined in advance by an ideal conception embodied in him, the environment can still play a role in determining the ultimate outcome of the individual's development. For it can serve as an eliciting factor, drawing out into the open what already exists within. Therefore, although Mill believed that God "gave all human faculties," he conceived it to be the task of the social environment to cultivate and unfold them, just as it was in the power of the society to root them out and consume them.² Thus, although the nature of man is predetermined by God and can in no way be changed, society may assist or obstruct its actual realization. In a similar way, Freud speaks of the "congenital libidinal factors" being "awakened" by actual experience.³

¹ Rousseau, *Origin of Inequality* (Allen & Unwin). ² J. S. Mill, op. cit.
³ *Collected Papers*.

If man is naturally good, it is obviously to the advantage of society to cultivate the inborn patterns to the fullest, to allow man the greatest self-expression. But, if man is thought to be naturally evil, then the main function of society must be to restrain and control his impulses. This was the view of Hobbes. Although the natural man is still with us and can never be got rid of, his behaviour may nevertheless be altered for the better by the presence of the powerful state. Each individual alone would act as he pleased, as his natural tendencies dictated, but in society he cannot do so. Should the state be destroyed, the behaviour of man would revert to the war of each against all, which prevailed in a state of nature. From this point of view, the sole function of society becomes to suppress the inborn tendencies of the natural man. Yet, while this exerts an influence upon the ineradicable animal nature, it does not really change it. Freud's affinity to Hobbes is astonishingly close. He also believes the natural tendencies of man to be largely anti-social, and that the main business of society is to prevent these impulses from destroying society. "The function of education," he says, "is to inhibit, forbid and repress. . . ."¹

In Hobbes, the restraining forces of society remain always on the outside, in the form of the state. In Freud, however, education brings it about that the inhibiting forces become internalized, set up within the individual himself. Hence the antagonism between the natural man and society is converted from an overt struggle to an internal conflict between the natural man on the one hand and the social man on the other.

Society, however, does not restrain all of the impulses of the natural man. It must provide some outlet for his energies. And in this way also, society may alter man's behaviour without changing his essential nature. From this point of view, the same impulses may, in different societies, find varying modes of expression. In one period of history, man may fight with a bow and arrow, in another

¹ *New Introductory Lectures* (Hogarth Press).

he may satisfy the same impulses by simply pushing a button which fires a shell against a target miles away; at one time he may tattoo himself, at another wear palm beach suits and straw hats; primitively, he may worship his ancestor the alligator, while now he satisfies the same natural impulse upon his Father in heaven. The forms of behaviour, the surface conduct, these may change; but always man remains the same at heart. Schopenhauer, that over-grown philistine, expresses the view succinctly: "Character is innate, and conduct is merely its manifestation."¹ The varying cultural forms only provide the external material upon which the inborn pattern seizes and expresses itself.

It is perfectly clear that if we begin with the conception that the animal nature of man is immutable, we must agree also that society cannot alter it. But social life unquestionably has an effect upon each individual. Everyone acquires language, learns the rules of conduct, becomes aware of the moral standards; in a word, each individual is a carrier of the particular culture into which he was born. Now if this culture is incapable of altering in any fundamental way the essential nature, then within each individual there must be a separation between the natural man and the social man. Culture must remain isolated from the inborn nature. The latter is not really changed by culture, but only overlaid with it, weighted down by it, pressed deeper and deeper into the subterranean regions so that it can rise to the surface only if it is properly dressed. Translated into psychological terms, this means that there must be a separation between the hereditary characteristics and the socially acquired characteristics, or that with regard to any single characteristic, "part" will be assigned to heredity and "part" to the environment. It may be admitted by the bourgeois theorist, as it was by Rousseau, that the separation is not clear in reality. But *in theory*, the dichotomy is essential.

¹ A. Schopenhauer, "On Human Nature", in *Essays of Schopenhauer*, trans. by T. B. Saunders (Allen & Unwin).

Implicit in all social contract theories is the obligation to explain society and its institutions from the nature of the individuals composing it. As Spencer maintained, "the structures and action throughout a society are determined by the properties of its units. . . ." ¹ In order to accomplish this design, the requisite qualities must first be abstracted from the behaviour of actual social individuals, ascribed to the inherent nature of isolated individuals, and then the nature of society is deduced from them. Hobbes devotes the first quarter of his *Leviathan* to a consideration of "man", that is to say, of the individual abstracted from his social context. To him are ascribed certain passions which would bring him into conflict with other similar individuals so that the state of nature is conceived as one of continual strife. But these isolated men are also motivated by natural fears and hopes to desire peace, and they are guided by a natural reason which is capable of leading them to the correct solution of their woes. From these premises can be deduced the formation of a group in which the competitive passions are mutually renounced and an external power, the state, agreed upon to enforce this renunciation upon each individual. The nature of society is easily seen from the nature of the individuals, for if the state power were to be destroyed, no individual would any longer be able to depend upon his neighbours, and the warring condition of nature would ensue. It follows that the state is absolute and can be limited only by its own power.

Just as capitalism is thought to be explained by a reference to the profit-seeking instincts of individuals, so the social institution of patriarchal monogamous marriage is often thought to require for its elucidation a reference to an innate urge of one man to live with one woman, together with their children. Under the name "individual family", this arrangement is sought in all primitive groups existing to-day. And however faint are the indications of its

¹ H. Spencer, *Study of Sociology* (Watts), cited by Jackson, *Dialectics*.

presence, however it may still be completely dominated and absorbed by more primitive forms of organization, it is proclaimed the very seed out of which the whole group has grown. Society is only the "extension" of the individual family. Locke was able to trace this form of the family back to Adam and Eve as well as to animals.¹ But the vast strides of bourgeois anthropology since then make it possible for Malinowski to drop the Adam and Eve story and rest his case on "animal marriage" alone, especially that of apes. During the rut, Malinowski believes,² a female may have intercourse with several males. Upon impregnation, however, she "ceases to be attractive" to all males except the future father of her offspring. To him, she continues to be attractive. The quite superhuman knowledge which the male exhibits by being aware that he and no other is to be the father of the future offspring elicits a new response in him to remain with the female. Their "mutual attachment; the tendency of the male to remain with his consort, to guard her, assist her, and to protect and nourish her—these are the innate elements of which animal marriage is made up".³

With man it is the same, except that Malinowski admits here that social life contributes something to monogamy. The natural impulses may be confirmed by tradition and elaborated by ceremony, but in essence the social institution of monogamous marriage is "natural".

Now if social institutions can be derived from the innate urges of individuals, it follows that society is nothing but a simple aggregation of such independent units, each acting in accordance with his own nature, except as prevented by the social contract. Society as a *system* of active, practical relationships, evolving according to laws which are not deducible from the nature of individuals, does not exist. There is indeed no such thing as society, properly speaking, but only a number of independent individuals living side

¹ J. Locke, *Of Civil Government* (Dent).

² Malinowski, *Sex and Repression in Savage Society* (K. Paul).

³ *Id.*

by side. There can therefore be no such thing as social laws which are not in essence psychological laws. Sociology as a separate science does not exist. Freud says this with admirable clarity:

"For sociology, which deals with the behaviour of man in society, can be nothing other than applied psychology. Strictly speaking, indeed, there are only two sciences—psychology, pure and applied, and natural science."¹

But the individual units studied by psychology are substantially the same in Oxford Street and in the forest primeval. If social institutions are nothing but the working out of these unchanging human atoms, it follows that society itself does not change. Just as a single man may vary his overt behaviour while remaining the same at heart, so all the natural men in aggregation are essentially the same in any era. And society is the sum total of these immutable units. The costumes, the names, the superficial customs and forms of behaviour may vary and the size and complexity of the group be altered. But the fundamentals of society, those institutions derived from the nature of man, these do not change. Such is the implication of the isolated man concept.

Anthropological and historical facts demonstrate irrefutably that society has really changed. But the bourgeois, whose comfort is likely to be disturbed by changes in the future, continues to please himself by ignoring or minimizing the very great social changes which have occurred in the past. That primitive and modern society differ is admitted without question, but in accordance with the logic of the isolated man, the differences are treated as inessential or as purely quantitative. The bourgeois therefore tends to abstract from all societies what he believes to be common to them and then treats this abstraction as the essence of society. The individual may then be regarded as developing, not in concrete and changing social conditions, but in this abstract society which is reputed to hold for all times and places. The social environment is stripped

¹ *New Introductory Lectures*, (Hogarth Press).

to a poverty of "constant" factors so that it can hardly be distinguished from a mythical state of nature.

Thus for the bourgeois, human nature remains the same even if he admits the influence of social factors. For the two main conditions which result in the development of the individual, the internal forces and the external environment, are both everywhere essentially the same. Thus if environmental forces do not account for the sameness of human nature everywhere, hereditary factors can fill the gap and vice versa. This peculiar outlook is expressed perfectly by Freud. "Now the phylogenetic aspect," he says, "is to some extent obscured in man by the circumstance that what is fundamentally inherited is nevertheless individually acquired anew, probably because the same conditions that originally induced its acquisition still prevail and exert their influence upon each individual." "Apart from this," he adds, "it is unquestionable that the course of the prescribed development in each individual can be disturbed and altered by current impressions from without."¹

Freud has skinned, cleaned and boned the social environment until it presents nothing which differs qualitatively from his reconstructed "state of nature".

Marxism is the very antithesis of the isolated man theory and its necessary correlative, the social contract.

First, it insists upon the reality and importance of basic social changes. Society does change. The social order of the last third of the nineteenth century, for example, differed fundamentally from the long line of social orders which preceded it and from which it ultimately evolved. Its three main interpenetrating aspects, bourgeois property relations, Christian (particularly Protestant) sexual morality, and patriarchal monogamous marriage, developed from previous social forms which differed from them in essential ways. Behind the capitalistic, individualistic, competitive economic system, quite different forms of economic life extend into the past to primitive societies

¹ *General Introduction to Psychoanalysis* (Hogarth Press).

which were classless, communal and co-operative. The patriarchal monogamous family can count among its ancestors families which were at once polygamous and polyandrous, a group of sisters being married to a group of brothers; and further, family groupings of which the father was not a recognized member. And Christian sexual morality, with its emphasis upon modesty and chastity at any cost, will find in its lineal closet many an immodest skeleton whose sexual experiences were encouraged by adults from infancy.

These qualitatively different social institutions could not and did not spring from the inner natures of unchanging individuals. The laws of social phenomena cannot be reduced to the inner urges of its units taken in isolation. For society is not simply the sum total of a number of individuals standing side by side like tombstones in a graveyard. "Social life," said Marx, "is essentially practical."¹ The units are engaged in continuous, active, mutually changing, working relationships. And these practical relations compose a system which moves and develops according to laws which depend upon the inter-relations and not upon the parts taken separately.

The crisis which began in 1929 cannot be explained in terms of individual motives. Bourgeois economics which begins its analysis with isolated men absolutely precludes the possibility of such a crisis. No individual has an innate or any other kind of urge for depressions. Single individuals could only contribute to the making of a crisis by being bound up in particular ways with the practical activities of all other individuals. The crisis depended precisely upon the peculiar production relations of capitalism. Where these relationships did not obtain, as in the Soviet Union, no crisis occurred. And when these relations are everywhere abolished, cyclical crises will become a matter of history alone. Applied psychology is totally inadequate when faced with the movement of society as a whole.

On the other hand, just as the existence of a "capitalist

¹ K. Marx, *Theses on Feuerbach*, VIII (Lawrence & Wishart.)

nature" presupposes bourgeois production relations, so the individual's whole nature is contingent upon all of the social relations in which he develops from birth. Just as the nature of a capitalist is not determined by the single fact that he belongs to the species homo, so his whole nature is determined by the complex relations of a number of facts. It is determined by his existence in a definite milieu. The properties of man like the properties of water are contingent upon the surrounding field. At certain temperatures, water is a solid; at others, a gas. Its "liquidity" cannot be ascribed to its inner nature.

As we have seen, however, the bourgeois theorist can admit the influence of the environment without admitting that there is any essential difference between man in society and man in nature. This error, as we have also seen, arises from the fact that for the bourgeois there is no qualitative difference between nature and society. Since the appearance of homo sapiens the environment has remained substantially the same. Therefore the existence of man in a social milieu does not alter his natural qualities, i.e. those he would have possessed had he been born into a state of nature.

But Marxism proves that society is not simply the sum total of its units. It moves by laws of its own, social laws, which are not characteristic of nature. The social environment is qualitatively different from the natural environment. And his existence in this qualitatively different field transforms the nature of the individual.

The individual does not even *tend* to develop as he would in the forest primeval. His development is determined by the mutual relations of all the relevant factors in the concrete whole situation. And the forest primeval is not one of these determining factors. The development of the animal homo in a state of nature would be one thing. His development in society is another. The one produces the cousin to the ape, the other—man, properly speaking. Both developments do not occur in society. Marxism accordingly does not attempt to penetrate through particular historical creatures in order to catch a glimpse of

the natural man, for the natural man is as absent as the state of nature upon which he is contingent.

To seek for what is common to the two different environments and then to regard the common elements as the essence of man, or that which belongs to him whatever the conditions, is only to repeat the same error. It is to insist that certain elements of human nature are common to all times and places and therefore belong to the nature of man, and that society merely *adds* something to this essence. The effect of society upon homo sapiens is not the addition of a number of features to an essentially constant nature. Man is not the natural man plus the social man, heredity plus environmental changes, nor is man the heredity versus the environmental changes. The relation between the biological and the social adaptations is much more intimate than this.

It is true that the biological and the social functions are in opposition. There is, for example, an antagonism between the subcortical and the cortical processes. But the social adaptations of the cortex do not remain isolated from the rest of the organism. They enter intimately into its entire activity. The biological is completely permeated by the social, and changed qualitatively. Within the organism, the biological becomes transformed by being subordinated to the more inclusive social adaptations. While the biological and the social are antagonistic, they interpenetrate each other to form a single entity. This is only to say that they form a "unity of opposites". And to use this phrase is not to employ Hegelian "jargon" indiscriminately. It is to express as accurately as possible the observable fact that no human activity, however primitive it may appear, can occur on a purely biological plane. All those things which we appear to have in common with other animals such as sex, hunger, fear, or rage, are in us inextricably bound up with and changed by social processes. Even the movement of a finger is changed by being bound up with language. In unity with the social, the biological ceases to exist as biology just as hydrogen in its unity with

oxygen to form water ceases to exist as hydrogen. And in a similar manner, the hereditary and the environmental, the biological and the social, cannot be separated except at the cost of abolishing the particular human nature under consideration.

But not only is society in general qualitatively different from a state of nature. Different forms of social organization produced in the course of history also differ qualitatively from each other and move according to their own special laws. In each individual born into such social organizations there is the same interpenetration of the biological and the social. Psychology therefore must not treat the human being as if he developed in relation only to social forms "common" to all societies. Psychology "should be a theory of a living, integral, concrete individual in concrete social conditions".¹

The development of man in society is not the unfolding of what already existed within, planted by the hand of God. Something new is created. The social adaptations do not perform a negative function alone. It is not a question of the conflict between biological impulses and social blockages. The driving forces are quite as much social products as the social barriers which block them. Nor does society merely provide the forms in which the essential biological man expresses himself. The essential man is as much a social creation as the forms.

In a word, human nature is not a constant thing common to all men by virtue of their simple membership in a particular species. As men change their social conditions according to the laws of motion of society, they change their own natures. "The whole of history," said Marx, "is nothing but the progressive transformation of human nature."²

It has been submitted that the viewpoint of the independent commodity producer in capitalist society involves

¹ Kornilov, "Psychology in the Light of Dialectical Materialism," in Murchison, *Psychologies of 1930*.

² Quoted, *Textbook of Marxist Philosophy* (Victor Gollancz).

certain fundamental assumptions which have been embodied in the social contract theory, the most characteristic product of liberal bourgeois thought. These assumptions are opposed by Marxism at every point, yet, as the rest of this essay attempts to show, they form the basis for the entire structure of Freudian theory. And as if to make the picture complete, Freud has actually reconstructed a version of the origin of society in which the social contract itself appears in unmistakable if unique form.

CHAPTER III

THE MALE OEDIPUS COMPLEX

THE ARTIFICIAL COMPLEXES created by Luria were stable enough to permit experimental tests of their effects, but they were also easy to remove. Either hypnotic suggestion or a brief laboratory psychoanalysis resulted in effective "cures". It will be remembered, however, that Freud's attempts to remove by suggestion the complexes at the root of neuroses were not permanently successful, and a psychoanalysis requires long periods of strenuous effort to bring them to consciousness.

The complexes which must be dealt with in real life are not, like those of Luria, imposed upon fully developed personalities. They are much more firmly rooted, for they are important and integral parts of the personality itself. They arise from the repression of affective experiences of vital importance in the actual development of the person. Freud's investigations in fact drove him further and further back into the earliest years of the lives of his patients. The repressed affective traumas of later life proved to be intimately connected with emotional experiences of much earlier occurrence. "The patient's associations," he says, "led back from the scene one was trying to elucidate to earlier experiences, and compelled the analysis, which had to correct the present, to occupy itself with the past. This regression led constantly further backwards; at first it seemed regularly to bring us to puberty; later on, failures and points which still awaited explanation beckoned the analytic work still further back into the years of childhood which had hitherto been inaccessible to any kind of exploration."¹ These investiga-

¹ *Collected Papers.*

tions led Freud to conclude that the most important repressions occur in childhood.

What are the decisive emotional experiences of the child which are scheduled for repression? His life, up to the age of four or five at least, is dominated by his existence in a family. His mother is particularly important. It may even be that she is the only person with whom he is in continual relationship. She tends to all his needs, institutes prohibitions, teaches him to walk, talk, and possibly to take care of himself, and gives him the affection he demands, so that all of his activities are bound up with her. It is in part because of his relation to her that the other members of the family assume importance in his life.

It is to be expected that the decisive emotional experiences of the child should be bound up with the members of his family. Freud maintains that the important repressions are concerned precisely with the child's relations to his parents, relations involving love, jealousy and antagonism.

Normal love, says Freud without going beyond the popular formula, is the union of two currents, "affectionate feelings and the sensual feelings".¹ It is still necessary to insist upon the existence of sensual feelings in children, for in accordance with Victorian prejudice, children are still sometimes represented as coming into the world in a state of purity like Adam and Eve into the Garden of Eden, being corrupted only at the Fall which occurs at puberty.

The fact that children do have a sexual life is now thoroughly established, and is confirmed, if sometimes reluctantly, by innumerable competent child psychologists. It is agreed that infantile masturbation is well-nigh universal. Nor can the sexual life of the child be brushed aside by the consideration that it is not identical with normal adult sexuality, that it has nothing to do with coitus and reproduction. Sexual behaviour cannot be subsumed under "reproduction" as some authors still appear to believe. Masturbation, exhibitionism, peeping

¹ *Collected Papers.*

and sexual curiosity, childish games in which there is a mutual display of sex organs, these do not lead to reproduction, but their sexual character cannot be abolished by any display of prudish academicisms.

We do not begin, however, with the sexual aspect of love. Our starting point is the dependence of the child upon its family for the necessities of life, particularly nourishment. It is the fact of feeding which establishes the first stable post-natal relationship of the child to another person. Out of this relation of care on the one hand and dependence on the other, arise the affectionate sentiments of the child. Of the two currents which combine to make normal love, "affection is the older. It springs from the very earliest years of childhood, and was formed on the foundation provided by the interests of the self-preservative instinct; it is directed towards the members of the family and those who have care of the child".¹

This affection in both boys and girls is directed primarily toward the mother. And "from the very beginning", says Freud, "elements from the sexual instincts are taken up into it. . . ."² It is therefore because of the path previously laid down by the dependent condition of the child that his sexual impulses first become directed toward his mother.

This most shocking idea has called forth shrieks of irrational and thoughtless abuse from many directions. Yet if the infant has any sexual impulses at all, it is to be expected that they will be directed toward the mother whose protective function brings her into intimate and continual relation with him. The fact that the love of the child for its mother is in our family situation partly sexual, can be scouted only if it be denied also that the child has sexual impulses. This position is the one generally taken.

¹ *Collected Papers*. This statement is often contradicted. Affection is sometimes regarded as the sublimation of sex.

² *Ibid.*

But the denial of infantile sexuality is, in the face of the conclusive evidence of its existence, reactionary, and cannot consistently be maintained by Marxists.

The child's object-choice must not be conceived in adult terms. In comparison with the analytic picture which is "an enlarged and accentuated edition of the infantile sketch",¹ the child's love is but a "feeble adventure in play".² It is "something like a premonition of what are later to be the final and normal sexual aims".³

Even so, says Freud, "with boys, the wish to beget a child from their mother is never absent . . .; and this in spite of their being completely incapable of forming any clear idea of the means for fulfilling these wishes. The child seems to be convinced that the genitals have something to do with the matter, even though in its constant brooding it may look for the essence of the presumed intimacy between its parents in relations of another sort, such as in their sleeping together, micturating in each other's presence, etc."⁴ The masturbation which occurs at this period is regarded by Freud as the discharge of tensions set up in the child in relation to his beloved mother.⁵

Love for the mother is only half the story. As the sexual impulses of the child become more developed, his love begins to assume some of the other characteristics which we generally associate with it. The boy begins to want the mother all to himself. He desires her affection to be fastened exclusively upon him and begins to resent any signs that she loves or is loved by anyone else. He resents the intrusion of any other person who appears to receive her affection or is allowed to caress her. In short, he becomes jealous. And since it is the boy's own father who also receives the affection of the mother, the boy enters into a situation of rivalry in which his father is the principle obstacle to his

¹ *General Introduction to Psychoanalysis.*

² *Ibid.*, p. 295.

³ *Collected Papers.*

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Ibid.*

own exclusive possession of his mother's love. The "little man", says Freud, "wants his mother all to himself, finds his father in the way, becomes restive when the latter takes upon himself to caress her, and shows his satisfaction when the father goes away or is absent".¹

But the boy also has an affection for his father. His feelings are in this case contradictory. He both loves and hates his father, an emotional attitude which Freud calls "ambivalence". An ambivalent attitude to the father and an object relation to the mother make up the content of the simple positive oedipus complex in the boy.²

This complex, whatever its particular form—and usually it is far more complicated than this diagrammatic sketch indicates—plays a dominating role in the unconscious mental life of every individual. And it is, says Freud, "the nuclear complex of neuroses".³ Its importance arises from the fact that these first loves and jealousies of children establish a pattern which dominates the forms taken by adult sexual life. And since this pattern is bound to be repudiated in its original form by the growing personality, the adult impulses may, in the face of later frustration, follow the infantile impulses into repression with pathological results.

We now have to examine the way in which this observed complex is set into the fundamental premises of Freudian theory. Marxism must regard the oedipus complex, as well as the whole preceding sexual development, as determined in and inseparable from a particular form of the family of a particular stage of historical development. It must take account of the more comprehensive economic and social structure in which this family exists. This structure is the product of a long evolutionary series which has not been a progressive development in a single direction,

¹ *General Introduction to Psychoanalysis*.

² See *Ego and Id*, (Hogarth Press). Freud actually says: "... object relation' of a *purely affectionate kind* to the mother." This statement does not seem to agree with Freud's usual explanation.

³ *Collected Papers*.

but a dialectical process in which earlier forms do not expand along their original lines, but are superseded by successive phases which are qualitatively different from one another. We should not expect to find the oedipus complex a human characteristic of all times and places. It is not the product of the individual in an abstract environment common to all men, but of the individual in particular historical conditions.

This is not Freud's point of view. The oedipus complex, he believes, has universal validity.¹ It existed in primeval times just as now. It is not the product of particular historically developed conditions. It is previous to history, previous to society, and regarded by Freud as the chief generating source of social life. "The beginnings of religion, ethics, society and art," he says, "meet in the oedipus complex."²

The universality of the oedipus complex as it has been described by psychoanalysts has been questioned in a serious manner by several anthropologists, notably by Malinowski. In his book, *Sex and Repression in Savage Society*, he attempts to show that among the Trobriand islanders of Melanesia, the family life does not lead to a repressed love for the mother and sexual jealousy of the father, but to a somewhat different family complex.

The Trobriand family consists, like our own, of a mother, her husband and her children. But the "father" is not the head of the family. He does not possess any of the authority to which he is entitled in the bourgeois patriarchal group. Although at marriage the Trobriand woman now leaves her own family to live with her husband, the inheritance of property is still traced through her. Her children do not inherit anything from their "father" with whom they live, for the Trobrianders are still ignorant of the part played by the male in procreation. They inherit only from their maternal uncle, their mother's brother. Any authority which the father may possess is

¹ *The Interpretation of Dreams* (Allen & Unwin).

² *Totem and Taboo* (K. Paul).

exercised, not over his own children, but over his heirs, that is, over the children of his sisters.

The father, although he becomes the helper and friendly guide of his own children, does not, according to Malinowski, ever become the rival of his own sons. Added to these circumstances is the fact that the taboo against incest is concerned, not primarily with the mother, but with the sisters. From an early age, the little boy is impressed with the sinfulness of regarding his own sister in a sexual light. Neither he nor she may ever speak of each other in connection with sexual matters of any kind. The sister is shrouded in mystery. On the other hand, the temptation to direct sexual impulses toward the mother and the taboo against such impulses are relatively unimportant.

The effect of this situation, says Malinowski, is that the family complex is not the same among the Trobrianders as with us. "Applying to each society a somewhat terse, though crude formula," he says, "we might say that in the oedipus complex there is the repressed desire to kill the father and marry the mother, while in the matrilineal society of the Trobrianders, the wish is to marry the sister and to kill the maternal uncle."¹ In support of this contention, Malinowski reports from the dreams and mythology of these primitives. When he asked them if they had ever had incestuous dreams of their mother, he was invariably met with a "calm, unshocked negation",² while the same question with regard to the sister resulted in a "strong affective reaction"³. He was led to conclude that "the mother hardly ever appears in them and, if she does, these dreams leave no impression . . . while incestuous dreams about the sister occur and leave a deep and painful memory"⁴.

With regard to the father, there does not seem to be any evidence of hostility being manifested in dreams, while hostile dreams about the maternal uncle are common.

¹ Malinowski, *Sex and Repression in Savage Society*.

² Ibid., p. 95. ³ Ibid., p. 96. ⁴ Ibid., p. 97.

It is said that if anyone is able to prophesy the death of a man, "it will always be a *veyola* (real relative) usually the sister's son, who will foredream his uncle's death".¹

These observations are confirmed by Trobriand mythology. The father, says Malinowski, "is never mentioned, and does not exist in any part of the mythological world".² The rivalry between brothers or between nephew and maternal uncle is a common feature of Trobriand folklore.

In answer to this, Dr. Jones, the eminent psychoanalyst, replied that the real question avoided by Malinowski was the reason for the "peculiar" family arrangements of the Trobrianders. The matrilineal family, Jones said, is precisely the product of the oedipus complex, a way of avoiding in real life the antagonisms of the oedipus rivalry. The Trobrianders, he maintains, have repressed their knowledge of the part played by the father in procreation³ and have brought about "the decomposition of the primal father into a kind and lenient actual father on the one hand and a stern moral uncle on the other". By placing the authority of the actual father in the hands of the maternal uncle, the Trobrianders have been able to "deflect the hatred towards his father felt by the growing boy".⁴

¹ Malinowski, op. cit.

² Ibid.

³ This gigantic repression would involve the eradication of the father from the entire body of folklore. Such a thorough cleansing of age-long tradition is impossible even in Nazi Germany. And this fact is equally disastrous to Malinowski's view that the patriarchal monogamous family is the original animal family. The real reason the father does not occur in Trobriand mythology is that he is only beginning to play a part in society. Trobriand society cannot be explained in terms of "arrangements", but only as the result of social evolution from different forms in the past. It would seem apparent that the "peculiar" structure of Trobriand society points conclusively to a previous period in which the family was not only matrilinear, but also matrilocal. The woman would remain with her own family, instead of going with the husband. Automatically, her children would come under the authority of their maternal uncle. The father would play no part. And even now that the matrilocal group no longer holds, the uncle still retains his traditional authority. Malinowski refuses to accept this obvious conclusion because it refutes entirely his reactionary belief in an original family group of which the father is an important member.

⁴ See Malinowski, op. cit.

Now Malinowski, for reasons which will appear later, is willing with some minor reservations to accept this position as probable. He says that it is "perfectly in harmony with all the facts which I have discovered in Melanesia and with any other kinship systems with which I am acquainted through literature".¹ But he is not willing to agree that the oedipus complex in its original form *still* exists among the Trobrianders. It may be that originally their family form was a patriarchal monogamous one which would have produced the oedipus complex as we know it,² and it may be that this form was changed to the matrilineal in order to avoid the consequences of the boy's hostility for his father. But once this has happened, the new family form produces a different complex which is still closely related to the original one. He says: "If, however, as Dr. Jones seems fully to admit, the attitudes typical of the oedipus complex cannot be found either in the conscious or the unconscious; if, as has been proved, there are no traces of it either in the Trobriand folklore or in dreams and visions, or in any other symptoms; if in all these manifestations we find instead another complex—where is then the repressed oedipus complex to be found? Is there a sub-unconscious below the actual unconscious and what does this concept of a repressed repression mean?"³

We shall discover that the Freudian position actually does lead to the necessity for assuming a mysterious and unknowable sub-unconscious. In the meantime, I think it may be accepted that Malinowski has shown con-

¹ See Malinowski, *op. cit.*

² Dr. Jones does not believe that the oedipus complex depends upon the patriarchal monogamous group. It does not even depend upon the supposed constitution of the primal horde. Jones puts the difference with Malinowski and others succinctly. "In other words," he says, "the one set of thinkers would regard the oedipus complex as the product of a particular social and family organization, whereas the other set would regard it as the fundamental and universal motor of which the different social organizations are by-products." See *Sociological Review*, Vol. 27, p. 261. July, 1935.

³ Malinowski, *op. cit.*

clusively that the oedipus complex as described by Freud does not exist in the Trobriand islands. But what shall we say of his attempt to demonstrate that a close relative of the oedipus complex, a mere variety of it, does exist? The evidence presented for the "matrilineal complex" is instructive and interesting enough, but it has no relation whatever to the oedipus complex. The central element of the latter is an infantile amorous rivalry. But the maternal uncle does not even live in the same family group with his nephew. The taboo which exists between brothers and sisters brings it about that he can "never be intimate with the mother, or therefore with her household".¹ Consequently, he can never become a possible rival for the mother's affection. The antagonism which the boy demonstrates for his maternal uncle arises at a much later period of life and never involves any question of sexual jealousy. It is a rivalry which grows out of the fact that the uncle has authority over the boy and that his continued existence prevents the boy from coming into the inheritance which he has reason to expect upon the death of his uncle. Malinowski himself later recognized that his complex was not at all related to the Freudian one. "I have come to realize, since the above was written," he says, "that no orthodox or semi-orthodox analyst would accept my statement of the 'complex' or any aspect of the doctrine."²

We may conclude that amongst the Trobrianders, although there are certain manifestations of mental life which are superficially similar to those which have been discovered in our own society, neither the oedipus complex nor any variety of it exists.

Since Malinowski believes that the matrilineal family might very well have been preceded by a patriarchal family, he is constrained to admit that the Trobriand family may have been the product of a previous oedipus complex. Malinowski's refutation of the universality of the oedipus complex is consequently somewhat weakened.

¹ Malinowski, *op. cit.*

² *Ibid.*

It is necessary to extend our investigation beyond the Trobriand islands. First we must decide exactly what it is that we are to search for since we cannot conduct a full psychoanalysis upon the various primitive races open to examination.

The situation in which the little boy finds himself is one of rivalry, and his response is the jealousy of the "eternal" triangle. We are bound to test the assumption that the love triangle is eternal. Whether the mother or the father is the love-object or the rival, the affective content is invariably sexual jealousy. Unless there is a demand for the entire affection of a particular person and hostility toward any rival who may interfere with this exclusive possession, we cannot begin to speak of an oedipus complex. Jealous love is the decisive emotion which later becomes repressed. If it could be shown that such jealousy is not a universal character of human nature, it would follow that the oedipus complex itself was not universal. But this task must seem hopeless from the outset, for who does not know that sexual jealousy extends even beyond human nature into the very love-sick hearts of seals and beavers?

Yet Freud's description of the jealous boy cannot fail to rouse our suspicions. The boy, he says, displays "a peculiar tenderness towards his mother whom he looks upon as his own property, regarding his father in the light of a rival who disputes this sole possession of his".¹ Property attitudes toward other human beings cannot be taken for granted as the decree of fate. What is this jealousy?

"Jealousy," says Freud, "is one of those affective states, like grief, that may be described as normal." "It is easy to see that essentially it is compounded of grief, the pain caused by the thought of losing the loved object, and of the narcissistic wound, in so far as this is distinguishable from the other wound; further, of feelings of enmity against the successful rival, and of a greater or lesser amount of self-criticism which tries to hold the person himself accountable for his loss.

¹ *General Introduction to Psychoanalysis.*

“ . . . rooted deep in the unconscious, it is a continuation of the earliest stirrings of the child's affective life, and it originates in the oedipus or family complex of the first sexual period.”¹

Jealousy is not a very simple matter. It is a complicated emotion of grief, pain and enmity. It arises out of the fixation of the love impulses upon a particular object. It not only demands actual physical fidelity, but is equally aroused by the simple *thought* of losing the affection of the loved object. It comprises hostility toward any person who threatens to interfere with this exclusive physical and mental possession. And finally, it is clear from other phenomena that the little boy may regard his mother as having been “defiled” by the rival.²

It is in this sense that we must test the universality of jealousy. It may not seem so certain that jealousy can exist in animals other than man. It is a highly complicated response which we should hardly expect to find in mice and butterflies.

In fact, jealousy as it has been observed in mammals, has no reference to the exclusive sexual possession of a particular beloved female. Animal jealousy is only the manifestation of the struggle for access to females in general comparable to struggles for food. There is no object-choice involved.

This point is illustrated clearly by the behaviour of male seals which gather in great numbers on the rookeries several weeks before the arrival of the pregnant females coming to deliver their “pups”. Although the females have not yet been seen, the males exhibit their “jealousy” in continual combat. These struggles can hardly be regarded as contests for the possession of any love-object. They concern rather the securing of a favourable position near the shore where access to females in general is more assured. Those defeated in these preliminary battles, usually the younger males, retire to higher ground where they

¹ *Collected Papers.*

² See *Collected Papers.*

remain as "bachelors", ready to seize upon any stray female which might come within reach.

"On the arrival of the females, they are received one by one with much attention, and are coaxed by each bull into his territory. Frequently while one female is being escorted by a bull, some of the others, which had already been established in his territory, are appropriated by neighbours; but in most cases this is not noticed by the bull, whose attention is absorbed by each newcomer."¹

The females deliver themselves of their "pups" several days after their arrival. "No sexual congress takes place until some days after that event; but fierce fights meanwhile take place among the males. Notwithstanding this fighting the bull does not appear to know his own females individually, and when once one has strayed beyond his territory he has no further concern in her." "Some young bulls were even observed to mate with the females under the eyes of the old bull and within his territory without eliciting any manifestation on his part. It is clear that the blind sexual hunger of the males contains no element of individual attachment or of 'jealousy' in the usual sense of the word."

The jealousy of animals is the simple manifestation of sexual hunger. It has nothing to do with love or affection or personal choice. There is no demand for fidelity and certainly none for purity!

But what of the jealousy of human beings living under social conditions different from our own? The Ammassalik Eskimos of the east coast of Greenland may be used to illustrate the "jealousy" which is typical in primitive groups.²

The men are hunters and it would be a great handicap for one of them to be without a wife skilled in the skinning of animals and the preparation of meat. It is desirable for him to have two wives. These marriages, however, do

¹ Briffault, *The Mothers* (Allen & Unwin).

² From Jeannette Mirsky's essay, *The Eskimo of Greenland*; M. Mead, *Competition and Co-operation in Primitive Society*.

not include any exclusive sexual claims. "Complete sexual freedom exists before and after marriage."¹

The Eskimos in general, as is well known, are in the habit of lending the sexual services of their wives to guests or friends as a matter of simple hospitality. Among the Ammassalik, this custom takes the form of a game called "putting out the lamps". In the winter, several families live together in a single house and, whether there are guests present or not, the lights may be extinguished and sexual partners chosen at random. "In this game, both the married and the unmarried take part and complete liberty prevails."

An unmarried man, by participating in the game, obtains access to women who may or may not be married to other men. In addition, unmarried girls and temporarily unattached females are accessible to him at any time. Married men have all of these opportunities, and they may also if they wish exchange wives for a longer or shorter period. In the summer when the larger groups break up into smaller hunting families, this is the general rule. At this time, it also becomes more difficult for unmarried men to obtain access to women and they may attempt to abduct the economic partner of some other man. It is this action alone which calls forth the "jealousy" of the Eskimo. He does not claim or desire the exclusive sexual possession of his wife, much less demand all of her affection and attention. But she is a necessary economic asset and he is seriously inconvenienced if she is stolen from him. It means that he must either get her back or find another wife. He does not mind sharing her sexually with other men if, as in the game of putting out the lamps, he is assured that she will not be taken from him completely, or in a formal exchange of wives that he will have the other man's wife in exchange.

The conclusion which Jeannette Mirsky reaches is obvious. "Exclusive sexual prerogatives," she says, "do not seem to be the cause for competitive claims."³ There

¹ Mirsky, *op. cit.*, p. 62.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 66.

² *Id.*

is certainly rivalry for women, but this is not at all a sexual rivalry. It refers only to the necessity of securing an economic partner. It has no more reference to fidelity than does the competition of the seals for their pregnant females. "In this competition, there does not appear to be rivalry for a particular woman. Rather there is a constant scrambling around for any woman if she is desirable."¹ And this desirability refers to her utility as a helper and economic partner, not to her physical charms. "If she is attractive, this is pleasant, but not necessary."²

Dr. Westermarck, who is concerned to show the instinctive character of bourgeois marriage, defines jealousy very much as Freud has done. It always involves, he says, "an angry feeling aroused by the loss, or the fear of the loss, of the exclusive possession of an individual who is the object of one's sexual desire".³ Briffault's comment is that "it would be difficult to express more accurately what the jealousy manifested among primitive human races is not".⁴ And upon the basis of an extraordinarily competent survey of the evidence, he concludes: "There appears to be no ambiguity or obscurity on that score in our ethnological evidence. It is not the loss of exclusive sexual possession, it is not the loss of a particular individual, far less any idea of her defilement from her intercourse with other men, which arouses the fears or the anger of the savage."⁵ "What is spoken of as jealousy in primitive societies has no reference to exclusive sexual possession; what excites the sentiment and what the primitive male guards against is not the sharing of his claims of access to a given female, but the economic loss of that female and her abduction."⁶

In some primitive groups, particularly where the dangers of abduction are not so great, jealousy does not appear at

¹ Mirsky. op. cit., p. 62.

² Id.

³ See Briffault, *The Mothers*.

⁴ Briffault, op. cit.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

all. And this is true of societies in which two or more males cohabit with one or more females. Where several males live in constant association with a single mate, we should expect to find continually arising occasions for jealous behaviour. If jealousy is indeed an innate character belonging to the nature of man, growing out of a universal oedipus complex, polyandrous groups should certainly succeed in eliciting it. We might even be tempted to attribute the comparative rarity of polyandry to-day to the constant strain and to frequent outbursts of uncontrollable jealousy which would make this form of the family intolerable. But such an interpretation would be the exact reverse of the truth. Where polyandry is the established form of the family, jealousy is not at all to be observed.

The Todas of southern India "have a completely organized system of fraternal polyandry. When a woman marries a man, it is understood that she becomes the wife of his brothers at the same time". "The brothers live together and my informants seemed to regard it as a ridiculous idea that there should ever be disputes or jealousies of the kind that might be expected in such a household."¹

But what would be the feeling of the brothers if the wife should be unfaithful to them as a group and carry on affairs with men not belonging to the family? The Toda women contract just such sexual alliances with men who can never be their husbands. These affairs are recognized by society as perfectly respectable. The prospective lover makes application to the woman's husbands to establish such a connection. And since the wife does not leave her husbands to live with her lover (or lovers), he (or they) comes to live with the woman and shares her household with the legal husbands. "Notwithstanding these singular family arrangements," says Major Ross King, "the greatest harmony appears to prevail among all parties, husbands, wives and lovers."²

Dr. Rivers, who does not at all approve of polyandry,

¹ W. H. R. Rivers, *The Todas*, pp. 515-16.

² Cited by Briffault, *op. cit.*

complains that it "must invariably weaken the sentiment of possession on the part of the man which does so much to maintain the more ordinary forms of marriage."¹ It never occurs to Dr. Rivers to ask if perhaps the "sentiment of possession" never develops at all in Toda society and does not have to be "weakened".

The same observations have been made in other polyandrous groups, and these facts are so well established that even Dr. Westermarck, who believes jealousy to be "a passion of very great intensity . . . belonging to the nature of man", is forced to admit that "this practice presupposes an abnormally feeble disposition to jealousy of all people among whom polyandry occurs. . . ."²

Polyandry, however, is not the abnormal form of the family that Dr. Westermarck implies. The evidence of its previous existence among peoples all over the earth, while it will not convince bourgeois anthropologists any more than Marx's proof of the downfall of capitalism will convince bourgeois economists, is conclusive.³ It is sufficient for our purposes to have shown that under definite historical conditions, jealousy as it is manifested in the oedipus complex does not belong to the nature of man.

Unlike the "jealousy" among primitives even where this is displayed, the oedipal jealousy is the complement of the fixation of the sexual urges upon a particular individual. And unlike primitive jealousy, it demands the physical fidelity of this individual. These factors alone are sufficient to show the difference. But only the most elementary aspects have been touched. The little Oedipus demands more than physical fidelity. His sentiment of possession extends beyond the physical aspects to include exclusive mental possession. He claims all of his mother's affection and tenderness for himself. The physical "infidelities" acquire at least a part of their painful character because they are

¹ Rivers, *op. cit.*, p. 532.

² See Briffault, *op. cit.*

³ *Ibid.*

the external signs that his mother's affections are not entirely his. He is alarmed also at the simple *thought* of losing his mother's love. He is concerned about her "purity". And finally, his own love is bound up with feelings of tenderness which are among primitives almost completely separated from their sexual urges.

The little boy in the oedipus situation manifests a highly cultivated form of jealousy which is dependent upon a long historical evolution. It is an evolution dependent upon the development of individual economic interests and the consequent ultimate establishment of monogamous marriage. Such a possessive attitude toward a particular person is contingent upon concrete social conditions which are not by any means universal even to-day. As Malinowski says: "The oedipus complex corresponds essentially to our patrilineal Aryan family with the developed *patria potestas* buttressed by Roman law and Christian morals and accentuated by the modern economic conditions of the well-to-do bourgeoisie."¹ To this we must add that it is also contingent upon the correlative development of romantic love which has taken place within historical times and was introduced into the family by the bourgeoisie.

Strangely enough, Freud seems to recognize the intimate connection between this highly refined jealousy and the social institution of monogamous marriage. He says: "The demand that the girl shall bring with her into marriage with one man no memory of sexual relations with another is after all nothing but a logical consequence of the *exclusive right of possession over a woman which is the essence of monogamy*—it is but an extension of this monopoly on to the past."²

In this passage we almost see the movement of society and the consequent development of sentiments, but unfortunately the statement is an isolated one and only serves to betray one more connection of Freud's thought

¹ B. Malinowski, op. cit.

² *Collected Papers*.

with the bourgeois outlook. If the oedipal jealousy demanding the "exclusive right of possession over a woman which is the essence of monogamy", is innate, then it follows that monogamy is the form of marriage which most accurately fits human nature. Even if it be admitted that other forms of the family exist, they must be regarded as aberrations from the normal. Monogamy must be thought, to use Malinowski's evasive phrase, the "typical" form of the family.

It is at this point that the Freudians and the reactionary anthropologists, in spite of disagreements, are complementary. Freud regards the oedipus complex as the "universal motor" of which various social forms are the by-products. All social life, he believes, is an extension of the oedipus attitudes into wider and wider human relations. Malinowski, Lowie, Goldenweiser and others may or may not disagree with this, but they believe that all social life, including the various primitive systems of kinship, are but extensions of the "individual" or monogamous family grouping. What are these but two ways of expressing the same error, two sides of a bad penny? For the oedipus complex is nothing but the system of sentiments which develops out of and corresponds to the modern "individual family". Freud emphasizes the emotional aspect of these relations, while the anthropologists concentrate upon the relations themselves. The two views are not at all contradictory. Susan Isaacs, for instance, says: "The particular tensions of jealous rivalry, the love and longing and hatred, to which the human child is exposed from a very early age take their rise in this family situation."¹ With Freud, she believes in the universality of the oedipus complex, and with the reactionary anthropologists, she regards our particular historically developed family as a *human family*. It is easy to see why Malinowski, in spite of his objections to the universality of the oedipus complex as described by Freud, can nevertheless agree with Dr. Jones that the matrilineal family is

¹ S. Isaacs, *Social Development in Young Children* (Routledge).

a way of avoiding the consequences of an original oedipus complex.¹

Reuben Osborn, by assuming the universality of the oedipus complex and wishing also to adhere to the Marxian idea that the family has evolved, becomes completely snared. In order to account for the oedipus complex in conditions of group marriage, he must find within such a group the eternal biological unit of mother, father and children. So, on the strength of a statement by Engels that the "separate existence of pairs for a limited time is not out of the question", he suggests that the oedipus complex would be found in such a group. The hesitancy of his expression is a witness to his dilemma: "It is extremely unlikely that the circle of those who ministered to its wants and exerted authority over its demands, could not be narrowed to a *few* adults who would stand in the relation of father and mother to it."²

Having admitted that such a relation could occur but need not, he immediately denies without knowing it the universality of the oedipus complex. "In any case," he says, "where the child is collectively cared for by all the men and women of a group, it would only mean that its love-objects would tend to correspond with the group rather than with any particular individual."³ As we know, the sentiment which forms the *sine qua non* of the complex is precisely the jealousy occurring in relation to the demand for exclusive possession of the affection of a particular individual. To say that group marriage would "only" transform the child's love-object from an individual to a group, is to say without knowing it that group marriage would exclude the possibility of the oedipus complex.

In this single example is shown the impossibility of setting Marx and Freud side by side. Wishing to follow Marx, Osborn assumes that monogamy is the end product

¹ Malinowski says: "I would like to state here, at once, that in this I am very much in agreement with Dr. Jones' point of view, though I might differ in certain details." *Op. cit.*

² Osborn, *Freud and Marx*.

³ *Ibid.*

of a long historical evolution, and wishing to follow Freud, he assumes that the sentiment "which is the essence of monogamy" is eternal. The forms of the family and their corresponding sentiments are equally historical products and change as society changes. The jealousy of the oedipus complex is no exception. No such complex could exist in Toda society for the essential emotion of which it consists is unknown to the Todas.

If Freud should object to the evidence furnished by primitives on the ground that if anyone appears to be without jealousy "the inference is justified that it has undergone severe repression and consequently plays all the greater part in his unconscious mental life",¹ the mistake would only be reaffirmed. To contend that the Todas are really jealous by nature, but have repressed that jealousy, is equivalent to the assertion that they are by nature monogamous but for peculiar reasons have adopted polyandry. It would be to maintain that Toda infants are monogamous, but that as they grow up they abandon these natural sentiments in favour of an abnormal family arrangement.

Freud has considered the boy's development, not in a concrete social milieu, but in an abstract environment consisting of two abstract parents. He has not investigated the effects of other forms of family life. He has not considered whether his monogamous parents are primitives or moderns. He has taken their existence and their society for granted. And if he has not assumed the eternity of the bourgeois family, he has affirmed the immutability of its emotional essence.

¹ *Collected Papers.*

CHAPTER IV

THE ANIMAL NATURE OF MAN

THE CHILD'S SEXUAL life is not a simple and static thing. It is surprisingly rich and varied in content and evolves from birth through a series of stages which differ qualitatively from one another. Freud has expressed this dialectical development in terms which are somewhat familiar to Marxists. The sexual life, he says, "does not first spring up in its final form, does not even expand along the lines of its earliest forms, but goes through a series of successive phases, unlike one another, in short . . . many changes occur in it, like those in the development of the caterpillar into the butterfly."¹ Each stage is overcome by the next and forced into repression.

The psychosexual development, like the oedipus complex which is "the essential part of its content",² is thought by Freud to proceed independently of the social milieu. It is reputed to be a mode of development common to all human beings whether born in the forest primeval or in a taxicab.

We must not become confused if Freud sometimes refers to the part played in this development by external "reality". As we have already seen, this reality is of the most abstract kind. It does not include the differences between one society and another. There is not even a clear differentiation between society and a state of nature. This reality is thought to consist of those circumstances which are everywhere and at all times the same. "I cannot feel surprised," says Freud, "that what was originally produced by certain circumstances in

¹ *General Introduction to Psychoanalysis.*

² *Collected Papers.*

prehistoric times and was then transmitted in the shape of a predisposition to its reacquirement should, *since the same circumstances persist*, emerge once more as a concrete event in the experience of the individual.”¹

This concession to a thin, colourless and static “reality” can easily be and often is quite withdrawn. Freud believes that it is not even necessary for the *same* circumstances to persist. If the child’s own experience does not provide sufficient material in which the inborn pattern may express itself, he will reach out beyond his own individual life to the experiences of his ancestors. “He fills in the gaps in individual truth with prehistoric truth.”²

The child thrusts his way into society precisely as he would have done into a state of nature. His development is nothing but the “natural” development. It is easy to recognize here the childhood of the natural man. Although this entire infantile pattern must be repressed into the unconscious early in life, there it becomes reinforced, particularly at puberty, by the maturing instincts. It retains in the unconscious its purely biological character. The “ineradicable animal nature of man” persists throughout life as a special region of the personality called the “id”. This is the fully grown natural man who lives in every society and must be kept always under the control of social restrictions. “. . . each individual, successively joining the community, repeats the sacrifice of his instinctive pleasures for the common good.”³

Freud admits, as did the social contract theories, that it is very difficult to distinguish between “what is fundamental” in human nature and what has been imposed by society. “It is not always easy,” he says with considerably more optimism than Rousseau, “to distinguish between what is due to the influence of the sexual function and what to social training.”⁴ The separation in the

¹ *Collected Papers*.

² *Ibid.*

³ *General Introduction to Psychoanalysis*. .

⁴ *New Introductory Lectures*.

personality between the biological and the social is not manifested in overt behaviour. To discover the natural man is a perplexing problem. "What experiments," asks Rousseau, "would have to be made, to discover the natural man? And how are those experiments to be made in a state of society?"¹

Freud would appear to believe that the psychoanalytic technique is exactly what Rousseau needed. It is by means of this technique that he has uncovered the id which he believes to be "man's archaic inheritance".²

The id is "what is original, primitive and infantile in mental life, what we find in operation in the child, but in part overlook in him because it is on so small a scale. . . ."³ It is "something analogous to instinct in animals. . . ." It includes "all that is discarded as useless during childhood and this need not differ in its nature from what is inherited".⁴ But the id is not at all like Rousseau's noble savage. It is a "cauldron of seething excitement".⁵ It is a bundle of strivings or wish impulses which in themselves know no restraint. If they contradict each other, neither is cancelled, but both fuse to form a compromise impulse. There is no negation in the id, no doubt or hesitation. It seeks immediate satisfaction, uncontrolled by any circumspection or any comprehension of delay. It is completely subordinated to the striving for pleasure. It refuses to be concerned with the exigencies of real life and its fluidity enables it to flow into substitute channels if one channel of satisfaction is closed to it. If frustrated in reality, it finds satisfaction in fantasy. It is completely amoral, for it is purely biological and cannot be changed by social influences.

Like the natural man of Hobbes, this creature cannot exist in society without the constant imposition of restraint. The id cannot be changed in its essential nature by external

¹ Rousseau, *Origin of Inequality* (Allen & Unwin).

² *Collected Papers*.

³ *General Introduction to Psychoanalysis*.

⁴ *Collected Papers*.

⁵ *New Introductory Lectures*.

influences. It is ineradicable. But it can be subdued and controlled. Society can oppose to it barriers which prevent its activity in certain anti-social directions and steer its impulses to a certain extent into productive channels.

From this point of view, the primary task of society must appear to be the suppression of the unrestrained biological urges. Freud's views on education are at once this logical conclusion of the isolated man concept and also a reflection of patriarchal authority. "Let us get a clear idea," he says, "of what the primary business of education is. The child has to learn to control its instincts. . . . The function of education, therefore, is to inhibit, forbid and suppress, and it has at all times carried out this function to admiration."¹

What can the profound investigations of psychoanalysis contribute to this hoary patriarchal theory of education? Freud goes on: "But we have learnt from analysis that it is this very suppression of instincts that involves the danger of neurotic illness. . . . Education has therefore to steer its way between the Scylla of giving the instincts free play and the Charybdis of frustrating them. Unless the problem is altogether insoluble, an optimum of education must be discovered, which will do the most good and the least harm. It is a matter of finding out how much one may forbid, at which times and by what methods."²

It is evident that the view is highly mechanical. The central question involved is a quantitative one. The ideal is to find an "optimum" of education which will restrain the natural man without making a neurotic out of him. At this point, education will have reached its ultimate limits and society will be capable of nothing more in the way of producing better human beings. "If we can find an optimum of education which will carry out its task ideally, then we may hope to abolish one of the factors in the aetiology of neurotic illness, viz., the influence of accidental infantile traumas. *The other factors* (my italics,

¹ *New Introductory Lectures.*

² *Ibid.*

F. B.), the power of a refractory instinctual constitution, can never be got rid of by education."¹

The movement of society and the development of human beings through this movement is nowhere apparent. The highest ideal which Freud can imagine is a simple mechanical balance of forces between the unchanging natural man and invariable social restraints. He appears actually to believe that education might possibly allow an individual to grow up in society on a purely biological basis, that in fact there is a danger of it doing so!

Society must also provide some overflow for this melting-pot of instincts. If it dams up the fluid id impulses, it may also direct them into useful channels. And like a dam which must hold back the full force of the water, but in one society allow it to escape into the fields for irrigation, and in another, utilize it to produce electricity, so the id may at one time in history find an outlet in group marriage and at another in monogamy. In all societies, the id, like the water, remains the same. The id can produce varying social expressions without itself changing.

It may be objected here by those who have some acquaintance with Freud that he often speaks of the "transformation of instincts" and that a great part of his whole work is devoted to elucidating the ways in which these transformations occur. It is certainly true that Freud does speak of the transformation of instincts. On the other hand, he insists that the id which is the totality of instincts remains always the same, which is only another way of saying that essentially the instincts are not really transformed. The latter is in fact Freud's considered opinion. Momentarily the instincts may make themselves visible in disguised fashion. The disguises may change from moment to moment and from one historical period to another, but they themselves are no more really changed than is the face of a child by being covered with a mask. The "mental representatives" of the id, both in the conscious and the unconscious, may vary, but that which ~~they~~

¹Id.

represent, the id itself, is in the fullest sense of the word immutable.

We must pause a moment to consider this relation between the immutable id and its extremely variable mental representatives by which it has become known to us. The postulation of any immutability leads invariably to philosophical idealism and the abandonment of scientific materialism. We shall indeed trace Freud's transition from mechanism to vitalism. Here it is only necessary to note in passing the germ which later grows into a vitalistic monster.

Tucked away in an essay of 1915, we find a passage which shows unquestionably that the assumption of the immutability of the id is pointing toward the realm of the unknown and that Freud is preparing to take his leave of the real world in order to follow this path.

An instinct, he says, "can never be an object of consciousness . . . only the idea that represents the instinct. Even in the unconscious, moreover, it can only be represented by the idea. If the instinct did not attach itself to an idea or manifest itself as an affective state, we should know nothing about it."¹

If the instincts are indeed immutable, clearly they must be separated from their changeable presentations. Even when not attached to a particular idea, the immutable instinct must continue to exist. But where? If not in the conscious and not in the unconscious, then where is it? Perhaps Malinowski was not far off in asking if there was not then a sub-unconscious where the oedipus complex in itself resided while its mental representatives occupied both the conscious and the unconscious.

The mental representatives of the id, which are not the id-in-itself, provide the only evidence we have that the id exists. If these mental representatives were abolished, the immutable id-in-itself would still remain. Such is the implication. The id-in-itself therefore is not only immutable. It is also unknowable!

¹ *Collected Papers.*

It is interesting to note that Freud's "id" and Schopenhauer's "will" are identical. The will, according to Schopenhauer, is immutable. It receives from knowledge (i.e. society) only "a series of motives by which it successively develops its nature and makes itself cognizable or visible. . . ." ¹ Thus the will may present different forms, but in itself it "never changes". Schopenhauer, who believed that the world was his idea, openly proclaimed that the will was precisely the unknowable thing-in-itself of the Kantians. The conception of the immutability of the id is the leak in the dike through which gushes a flood of nonsense.

Reuben Osborn attempts to reconcile the theory of the ineradicable animal nature of man with Marxism. He believes that psychoanalysis is the "science dealing with the desires and urges characteristic of man. . . ." ² Marxism is "the science dealing with the external conditions which either fulfil or frustrate those desires". ³ It is only necessary to add them together to produce a theory of the dialectical relation between the individual and society. There is an "interaction between the inner instinctive urges and the world of economic and social necessity". ⁴ This interaction Osborn wishes to call a dialectical unity.

The unity or interpenetration of opposites means nothing at all if the opposites do not interpenetrate. That is, the unity of the two opposing facts must involve their mutual transformation. Each factor, by forming a real active unity with the other, becomes subordinated to this new and larger whole and is transformed qualitatively. The two opposites do not simply rub surfaces. They form an internal unity. They permeate each other. It is possible to say, as Lenin said, that together they form an "identity". ⁵ Although in opposition, they are one thing.

For Osborn the "interaction" of the biological and the

¹ Schopenhauer, *Human Nature*, chapter on Free-will and Fatalism.

² Osborn, *Freud and Marx*.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Lenin, Notes on Dialectics in Materialism and Empirio-Criticism.

social remains an external surface relationship. If the instinctive desires and urges are characteristic of man in general whatever his social milieu, it is obvious that the urges are not at all changed by this "interaction" with the social environment. The behaviour or the ideas which result from this interaction may change, but the id itself remains intact. The instincts are unalterable, but their mental representatives or, as Strachey would say, "the particular type of consciousness"¹ may change.

If the id is immutable, then clearly it never becomes interpenetrated by the social adaptations. To put an ineradicable unit into a changing pattern and to call the result a unity of opposites is to misunderstand Marxism completely. If the nature of man remains basically the same under any conditions, this should be proclaimed as the first discovered exception to dialectics and the refutation of Marxism. It can hardly be taken seriously as an example of dialectics and the supplement of Marxism.

Osborn of course attempts to show that this position is in agreement with Marx. Marx, he says correctly, did not conceive of the individual as passive. The individual is not an inanimate mirror reflecting the external world. The sensuous perception of the world must not be conceived as contemplation but as "human sensuous activity practice", i.e. "subjectively"²

This "subjective" aspect of human life is taken by Osborn to be precisely the id. Osborn interprets Marx to mean that the subjective side is *purely biological*. This interacts with the external world and particular forms of behaviour and thought result. Now Osborn might agree with Schopenhauer that "what is subjective is not open to us to acquire, but making its entry by a kind of *divine right*, it remains for life, immutable, inalienable, an inexorable doom".³ This is indeed a fair description of

¹ See Preface to *Freud and Marx*.

² K. Marx, *Theses on Feuerbach*, 1.

³ Schopenhauer, *Essays*.

Freud's view, but it certainly cannot be foisted onto Marx. Even in the elementary act of sensuous perception, man does not see with the pristine eyes of the natural man. ". . . the education of the five senses," said Marx, "is the product of universal history."¹ The subjective side is certainly open to us to acquire and cannot without the most lamentable misunderstanding of Marx be identified with the "ineradicable animal nature" of Freud.

The bourgeois point of view leads inevitably to a separation within the person between the biological and the social, the hereditary and the environmental. In Freud, it has led to the separation between the instincts and their mental representatives, between the "sexual function" and "social training". Robert Briffault, whose whole work is a brilliant refutation of this position, falls into the error himself. He expresses the view so clearly that we cannot refrain from allowing him to summarize the point at issue. "The brute animal," he says, "which lurks within every socially developed individual is held in leash, and is disowned and unacknowledged by the educated consciousness. The latter does not so much displace and modify the biological inheritance as becomes superimposed upon it as a mental sphere which is not only different, but sharply contrasted and antagonistic. So real is that opposition between the two mental inheritances, the biological and the social, that they may without exaggeration be spoken of as two distinct minds."²

The social environment, as Briffault correctly states, takes its effect upon the individual largely through the functional development of the cortex, a development which occurs principally under the influence of language. These new social functions are in opposition to the lower functions of the sub-cortex. Every modern neurologist recognizes the strife which exists between these two spheres. But they do not for the most part recognize that these two spheres interpenetrate each other to form a new and more inclu-

¹ See *Textbook of Marxist Philosophy*.

² R. Briffault, *The Mothers*.

sive unity. The relation is not at all one of simple opposition. "In this process," says Luria, "the higher cortical mechanism does much more than play a simple negative role." Such a conception is only a repetition of the purely mechanistic belief that the activity of the whole organism is simply the sum total of the activities of the individual body cells, each one of which is capable of excitation and inhibition. The cortex is thought to be capable only of inhibiting the excitations of the sub-cortex.

The unity of the opposing processes, cortical and subcortical does not mean that "two distinct minds" interact or are "attached" so as to bring about only minor surface mutual modifications. It means that no activity, however primitive, of a socially developed human being can occur which does not involve the higher functions. It is not enough to say that everything that distinguishes man from the beasts, everything that is specifically human, is dependent upon language. Such a view still retains the conception of a common animal nature which is not dependent upon language. Even those activities which we appear to share with other animals are in us bound up inextricably with social processes. "All of human behaviour," says Luria on the basis of his experiments, "is strictly dependent upon the higher cortical mechanism which we are accustomed to designate as the intellectual processes."²

The "sexual function" like the whole rest of the human being develops in a social milieu. The social adaptations do not lie mechanically upon the isolated biological basis. The social and the biological form a unity in which they are mutually transformed. The biological becomes subordinated to the newer functions and becomes itself something new. As Luria says, "Speech and the use of signs, the permutation of activity by the use of cultural means, make the human being a *new biological species* in history. These new functions do not remain isolated in the psychological processes, but permeate the whole activity and

¹ Luria, *The Nature of Human Conflicts*, p. 10.

² Ibid., p. 378.

structure of behaviour, so that we find them literally in every movement of the fingers."¹

The fact that heredity and environment do not form a mechanical relation of simple opposition has not escaped Freud's discerning eye. He has unquestionably perceived the unity of these opposing factors, their fusion as well as their strife. But Freud, as we know, began upon the premises of nineteenth-century mechanism, a philosophical view which does not admit the existence of such contradictions in real life. He is unable to escape from this stultifying position. Not being able to formulate his observations theoretically, he is unable to build upon them and make them an integral part of his thinking. It is instructive to consider some of his hesitant and incomplete attempts to express the fact that the biological is not really so ineradicable as we have been led to suppose. The ego which we shall consider more in detail later, is a region of the personality developed in relation to experience.² The relation between the hereditary and environmental factors within the person is expressed as a relation between the id and the ego.

In apparent perfect agreement with Marxism Freud says: "It would be unjustifiable to conceive of the ego and the id as if they were two opposing camps . . .," for "on the one hand, the ego is identical with the id, is only a specially differentiated portion of it". "As a rule we can distinguish them only when a state of tension, a conflict between them, has arisen."² Yet it is clear from the statement which immediately follows that the relative identity of the ego and the id does not really involve their interpenetration. ". . . the ego is an organized entity whereas the id is not."³ The differentiation of the ego from the id and their existence in unity, does not at all effect the remainder of the id. It remains as unorganized as before. The relation

¹ Luria, *The Nature of Human Conflicts*, pp. 426-8.

² As we shall see, this "experience" is not specifically and concretely social experience, even with the inclusion of the explicitly social super-ego.

³ *Problem of Anxiety*, pp. 29 and 30.

between the two is one of *attachment*. The ego is a surface modification of the id which does not transform the rest of the id.

The same difficulty is shown again and more clearly when Freud uses the terminology of whole and parts. "The ego," he says, "advances from the function of perceiving instincts to that of controlling them, but the latter is only achieved through the mental representative of the instinct becoming subordinated to a larger organization, and finding its place in a coherent unity."¹

It might appear that Freud is stating what Luria has proved, that the biological becomes transformed by becoming subordinated to the social adaptations, by becoming a part of a larger functional organization. But we see again that it is not really the instincts themselves which become subordinated to a more inclusive unity. It is only the "mental representative of the instinct". This is made certain a moment later when Freud repeats what he seemed to have corrected. "In popular language," he adds, "we may say that the ego stands for reason and circumspection while the id stands for the untamed passions."² That Freud did not really understand the language of whole and parts is proved by the fact that, when he translates it back into popular language, he only repeats the error that Aristotle made long before him.

The difficulty seems to be that Freud observes in real life the unity of opposites but cannot formulate this observation satisfactorily because his theoretical premises demand the separation. He himself tells us that this is what is the matter. "So we see in practice," he says, "a continual mingling and blending of what in theory we should try to separate into a pair of opposites—namely, inherited and acquired factors."³

If the unity of opposites is not formulated in theory, practice is left unguided. Theory cannot serve as the director of investigation in every particular case. The unity

¹ *New Introductory Lectures.*

² *Collected Papers.*

³ *Ibid.*

of hereditary and environmental factors becomes a matter of chance observation, not a principle permitting a consistent and accurate understanding of the dynamics of every concrete case of human behaviour.

The animal nature of man is in *practice* changed. Theory must recognize this fact. The biological in society is transformed. Into what? The biological is transformed precisely into the psychological. The transition of the one into the other may be made clearer if we take as our starting point Engels' method of elucidating the relations between the sciences. Physics, he said, is the mechanics of molecules, chemistry is the physics of atoms, and biology is the chemistry of albuminous substances in organisms. By stating the hierarchy of sciences in this manner, Engels wished to show the transition of one science into another. But he also emphasized the qualitative leap between them. While biology is the chemistry of albuminous substances, it is no longer chemistry in the strict sense of the word, but has become biology. New laws of motion have come into being.

In the same way, we may describe psychology as the biology of homo sapiens in society. A biological organism of a particular species is the subject of psychology, but, at the same time, a qualitative change has taken place. The biological organism, by its existence in society, has become a "new biological species". Its subordination to the social functions of the cortex changes its nature qualitatively. The "elements of the old, by being subordinated to the new system, by entering into the new synthesis, themselves become something new."¹ *The biological organism is transformed; it no longer exists as a biological phenomenon strictly speaking. Under the influence of society, the biological has become the psychological.* New laws of motion have come into being which are neither biological nor sociological, but the subject of study of a different science, psychology.

Not understanding the dependence of individual development upon social processes, Freud has tended to omit any

¹ *Textbook of Marxism*, p. 342.

serious examination of the conditions of infantile development. He often mentions the social circumstances, and his observations are sometimes exceedingly acute, but since they are not an integral and necessary part of his theory, they tend to be casual and haphazard. Freud has probed deeply into *what* the individual is and what he becomes, but by omitting the necessary conditions of this development, he hardly approaches the real scientific question of *how* this development takes place. The observation that the infant passes through certain stages from birth on remains simple description so long as the conditions of this development and the functional relations between the conditions is neglected. Scientific laws require more than the description of phenomena. They require the elucidation of the totality of conditions in which the phenomena are produced. Freud has discovered the results of a system of causal relations, but he has not discovered the causal relations themselves. Instead of being set firmly in a real social context, the individual has been placed in an erroneous philosophical construction.

The idea that the animal nature of man persists unchanged in the individual as a separate region cannot be accepted by Marxism. This does not mean, however, that the concept of the id is the product of fantasy and verbiage or even that it was sneaked out of the pages of Schopenhauer. Even in his most absurd speculations, of which there have been a number in recent years, Freud invariably has in mind specific phenomena which he has actually observed. His anthropological speculations which are for the most part absurd in the highest degree, are the ripping out of their proper context of processes which actually exist. The bourgeois point of view has led Freud to a belief in the persistence in society of the natural man. This is unacceptable. But we may be sure that what he mistakenly takes to be man's archaic inheritance is something which he has observed. If the id is not our ineradicable animal nature, what is it?

It is, as Freud has also told us, the infantile mental

life.¹ This he believes to be biological. The fact that it is not does not prevent it from existing. When Freud speaks of the ineradicability of the id, he is referring to his observation that the infantile modes of expression, the impulses and conflicts and complexes of childhood, persist in the unconscious of each adult, relatively unchanged.

The "evolution of the mind", he says, "shows a peculiarity which is present in no other process of development. When a village grows into a town, a child into a man, the village and the child become submerged in the town and the man. Memory alone can trace the earlier features in the new image; in reality the old materials or forms have been superseded and replaced by new ones. It is otherwise with the development of the mind. Here one can describe the state of affairs, which is a quite peculiar one, only by saying that in this case every earlier stage of development persists alongside the later stage which has developed from it. . . ."²

Neurotic symptoms are compromise expressions of the still existing complexes developed in early life. Just as the complexes inserted by Luría caused disturbances in the responses of his subjects, so these infantile complexes persist in the unconscious of the adult and produce effects which under certain conditions become pathological. That these complexes, conflicts, apparently irrational loves and hates, form a special region of the person is shown by the fact that an individual may revert almost entirely to such infantile modes of expression.

"The earlier mental state," says Freud, "may not have manifested itself for years, but none the less it is so far present that it may at any time again become the mode of expression of the forces in the mind, and that exclusively, as though all later developments had been annulled, undone. This extraordinary plasticity of the evolution that takes place in the mind is not unlimited in its scope; it might be described as a special capacity for retroversion—for regression—since it may well happen that a later and

¹ See *General Introduction to Psychoanalysis*.

² *Collected Papers*.

higher stage of evolution, once abandoned, cannot be reached again. But the primitive stages can always be re-established; the primitive mind is in the fullest meaning of the word, imperishable."¹

The detection in adults of infantile modes of expression and the recognition that adult conflicts can be bound up with disguised infantile conflicts is the basis of Freud's theory of neuroses. Individuals fall ill of frustration. But the blockages presented to adult activity, becoming more and more numerous and intolerable as capitalism becomes more moribund, are not alone capable of producing neuroses. It is necessary also to understand the blockages confronting childhood activity and the way in which the earlier and later conflicts become bound up together.

" . . . current repressed wishes," writes Dr. Jones, "cannot directly produce a neurosis, but do so only by reviving and reinforcing the wishes that have been repressed in older unresolved conflicts. According to Freud, a pathogenic disappointment or difficulty in readjustment leads first to an introversion or turning inwards of feeling and the wish that has been balked seeks some other mode of gratification. It tends to regress back to an older period of life, and thus to become associated with similarly balked and repressed wishes belonging to older conflicts. It is the combination of these two, the present and the old, that is the characteristic mark of the pathogenesis of neurotic disorders as distinct from other modes of reaction to the difficulties of life."²

In short, frustrated adult impulses abandon adult modes of expression and become bound up with the id, attempting to attain gratification according to the peculiar manner of the id.

The concept of the id formulates the fact that under capitalism and perhaps not exclusively there, individuals

¹ *Collected Papers*. This absolute immutability of the infantile repressed impulses has more recently been questioned by Freud himself. The id does change. See *Problem of Anxiety*, p. 109, note.

² Jones, quoted in Healy, Bronner, Bowers, *The Structure and Meaning of Psychoanalysis* (Allen & Unwin).

are unable to overcome and successfully resolve the conflicts of childhood. These conflicts become isolated from consciousness and from motor expression. They remain in the unconscious relatively unchanged, a part of the personality yet foreign to the personality, intruding upon the domain of adult life like strangers, producing effects which may or may not be useful but which in any case cannot be rationally controlled.

Freud cannot see that not only is the infantile mental life contingent upon the social milieu, so that it will be different in different societies, but also that the persistence into adulthood of this mental life whatever it may be, is not an invariable characteristic of human nature. The sharp split between the infantile development and the later development is the product of definite social processes.

The bourgeois family is the economic unit of capitalist society. Here, where each child begins his development as a social being, are to be found forms of all the contradictions inherent in bourgeois culture as a whole. Here, Puritan morality, patriarchal authority and bourgeois property meet. Besides these, the bourgeois family has contributed its own special contradictions to the world of the newborn. To mention one conspicuous and important example, the bourgeoisie has imported into the patriarchal monogamous family the conceptions and sentiments of romantic love which previously existed only outside the economic unit of society. That husband and wife should love one another according to the standards of a Christianized chivalry, and that lovers should marry; this is a bourgeois creation. The antagonism between husband and wife which grows out of patriarchal society becomes bound up with its opposite, romantic love between the economic partners. What was formerly only a more or less pleasant or unpleasant and admittedly unequal economic arrangement, becomes a deeply emotional love relation characterized as Freud would say by ambivalence. The inferior status of the wife is retained, but it is

contradicted by the equality which is assumed as the basis of the love relation. It is this new arrangement which, for example, stamps its character upon the jealousy of the oedipus complex and makes of it a highly cultivated sentiment.

In such a unit, where all the contradictions of capitalism, economic, social, intellectual and emotional are focused, life for the child begins. The child is immediately plunged into a most confusing situation. To mention only a few examples: he is encouraged to take an interest in his own bowel movements, to perform punctually and on demand. He is praised for his performance. But when this directed interest becomes intense and takes other forms than those desired by the parents, the child is violently condemned, and what he had been led to believe was the proper thing is reviled as shameful or dirty. Again, as Freud himself once pointed out, the bad emotional relations between the parents, involving all their sexual maladjustments, stimulate in the child precocious intensities of love, hate and jealousy. But then, "the strict training which tolerates no sort of expression of this precocious sexual state lends support to the forces of suppression, and the conflict at this age contains all the elements needed to cause lifelong neurosis".¹ Still again, the child is supposed to love his father under conditions which also produce hostility, and this hostility must be denied and remain unacknowledged.

When a child is born into a bourgeois family, he immediately falls heir to a vast number of contradictions which will require a revolution to resolve. The child is as incapable of dealing with them as the bourgeoisie is of dealing with economic crisis. His further development does not proceed upon the basis of the resolution of his mental conflicts. It can be based only upon escape from them by means of relegating them to the unconscious where they remain to plague him through adulthood on still more intense levels. Just as the forms of competition of liberal capitalism

¹ *Collected Papers.*

are not resolved by the advance to imperialism, but exist side by side with newer forms and are raised to more intense peaks, so the conflicts of infancy cannot be overcome by the further development of the child in our present society.

Why does the frustrated adult revert to these unresolved conflicts? The bourgeois family is not only a focal point for the contradictions of capitalism. There is also an antagonism between the family and society as a whole. The family is not just a part of society fitting neatly into the larger scheme. In some ways it contradicts the systems of which it is a part.

In spite of the antagonisms and conflicts in the bourgeois family, there is no doubt that within this group the friendly, affectionate, social impulses are first developed. While there is hatred and enmity, there is also love and mutual loyalty. If there is competition, there is also the possibility of trust.

This aspect of family life presents the sharpest contrast to the impersonal, competitive and anti-social activities which characterize adult life in the world of business. The individual emerges from family life, where love and trust are possible, into a world in which hatred and envy are indispensable. Each individual is reared to require love and to depend upon it and no individual can find it in the individualistic anarchy of bourgeois life. The bourgeoisie is a race of "Hollow Men", of lonely, isolated men. Each one is searching for friendliness and comradeship. The man who marries the girl so much like his mother, the poet who joins the church, the psychologist in search of his soul, each demonstrates that the social needs developed in infancy are not satisfied in adult life. The need for mutual dependence created in the family is satisfied only in the working-class movement, for the conditions of life increasingly set the bourgeoisie at each other's throats and increasingly bind the workers together with ties of mutual friendship and trust.

The only sphere in which the bourgeois has ever known

any degree of dependable social ties is in the family. Bad as it is, the family creates social beings who are thrown into an anti-social world. The neurotic technique is only the attempt of an isolated individual to get back to the family where mutual dependence was possible. But in retreating to the security of infancy, the neurotic must also re-enter the old unresolved conflicts of that period. He cannot have the "good" side alone. He must take all or nothing.

The key to the relation between Freud and Marx is not to be found in the relation of the subjective to the objective, nor in the relation between society and the instinctive "desires and urges characteristic of man". It is to be sought in the relation between bourgeois society as a whole and the bourgeois family. Marxists must study the way in which the economic and social contradictions of society as a whole combine with the subordinate contradictions of the individual family to form the conditions of development of the infant. They must study the way in which the family conflicts with society as a whole. Only then will the individual discovered by Freud find his place in the totality of conditions which determine his developing nature. Only then will we have a science of psychology which is a theory of a living concrete individual in concrete social conditions.

CHAPTER V

THE CASTRATION COMPLEX

THE OEDIPUS COMPLEX is the nuclear complex of the neuroses. The love of the little boy for his mother and his ambivalent feeling for his father lay down paths which under certain conditions of frustration lead to pathological effects and even in normal personalities help to determine later love choices.

The desires of the little oedipus, however, come into conflict with the taboo against incest and must undergo repression. The process by which the jealous love is abolished from consciousness is "effected in a typical manner and in conjunction with happenings that recur regularly".¹

It will be recalled that infantile masturbation in the boy is "only the discharge in the genital of the excitation belonging to the (oedipus) complex".² Any prohibition of masturbation therefore is at the same time a prohibition assimilated by the boy to his desire for his mother. "And to this connection between the two masturbation will owe its significance to him for ever after."³

The little boy who is beginning to play with his penis has not yet learned to conceal such practices. In time "he is bound to discover that grown-up people do not approve of this activity. More or less plainly and more or less brutally the threat is uttered that this highly valued part of him will be taken away. Usually it is from women that the threat emanates; very often they seek to strengthen their authority by referring to the father or the doctor, who, as they assure the child, will carry out the punishment".⁴ The assimilation of the threat to the father is

¹ *Collected Papers.*

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.*

brought about even if these references to him are not made, because of the character of the boy's relation to him. "When the boy perceives the powerful father as his rival for his mother and becomes aware of his aggressive tendencies against his father and his sexual desires towards his mother, he is quite right in being afraid of him."¹

This threat does not at first have any effect, for the child does not believe it, "nor obey it in the least".² It is only upon his discovery of the difference between male and female that the threat has its delayed effect. "Some day or other it happens that the child whose own penis is such a proud possession obtains a sight of the genital parts of a little girl."³ At first he tries to deny the evidence of his senses, "for he cannot conceive of a human being like himself without his most important attribute".⁴ He tries to persuade himself that the penis is really present in diminutive form and will grow in time. Then he may imagine that only unworthy females unlike his mother have no penis. Finally, "he is horrified at the possibilities it reveals to him".⁴ The loss of his own penis becomes imaginable and "the threat of castration achieves its delayed effect".⁵

This "castration anxiety" is the expression of a conflict between his incestuous desires and the fear of punishment for them. "If the gratification desired in consequence of the love is to cost the child his penis, a conflict must arise between the narcissistic interest in this part of the body and the libidinal cathexis of the parent-objects. Normally, in this conflict the first of these forces triumphs; the child's ego turns away from the oedipus complex."⁶ When this happens, "the latency period" ensues during which the sexual interests are temporarily abolished and the sexual energies turned into socially useful channels.

¹ *Problem of Anxiety*, p. 116.

² *Collected Papers*.

³ *Id.*

⁴ *General Introduction to Psychoanalysis*.

⁵ *Collected Papers*.

⁶ *Id.*

In this description of the conditions making for the repudiation of incest and jealous hostility, Freud has introduced factors which we must recognize to be the products of a particular social context. Further investigation, however, does not lead him to a more profound understanding of these conditions. It leads to the elimination of these conditions until the castration complex, like the oedipus complex, becomes quite independent of any particular social conditions and, as we shall see, independent of society itself.

Although threats of castration do occur, they are not essential. "Anyone who, in analyzing adults," says Freud, "has become convinced of the invariable presence of the castration complex, will of course find difficulty in ascribing its origin to a chance threat—of a kind which is not, after all, of such universal occurrence. . . ." ¹ Instead of searching further for the necessary conditions Freud invokes "phylogenetic phantasies". "The child in its phantasy," he says, "simply fills out the gaps in its true individual experiences, with true prehistoric experiences." ²

The complex appears to grow naturally out of the oedipus situation and is equally independent of social conditions. The situation of rivalry leads to a fear of the rival. This fear takes the form of anxiety lest the father take away that organ in which the pleasures of love are concentrated. As this sexual impulse grows stronger and with it the jealous hostility, the boy's fear of his father also increases until the only solution possible for him is his identification with his father, a repudiation of his sexual love for the mother, and a turning of his own hostility against himself in order to maintain the prohibition against the repudiated impulses. The oedipus complex by becoming stronger brings about its own destruction.

Now in this account, not a single necessary reference has been made to the social taboo against incest or to any other

¹ *Collected Papers.*

² *General Introduction to Psychoanalysis.*

social conditions. The repudiation of incest would appear to be an hereditary characteristic of human nature. The desire for incest disappears "because the time has come for its dissolution, just as the milk-teeth fall out when the permanent ones begin to press forward. Although the majority of human children individually pass through the oedipus complex, yet after all it is a phenomenon determined and laid down for him by heredity, and must decline according to schedule when the next pre-ordained stage of development arrives."¹

The abandonment of the incestuous love is determined by heredity and takes place in the presence of abstract parents. It would appear from this that society need never have imposed a taboo against incest, for if the purpose is not accomplished "individually", it will be accomplished by the predestined development.

It was Havelock Ellis who believed that the sexual attraction of familiar women was biologically less intense than the sexual attraction of strange women, and that the males would therefore voluntarily and "naturally" turn away from incest and seek their partners outside the family. Havelock Ellis believed that the diversion of sexual desire from the mother and sisters was the natural reaction to habitual relationship with them. Freud would seem only to add to this theory the role of the father. In each case, the simple abstract relations of the family would account for the ultimate repudiation of incest on the part of the boy.

Now Freud utterly rejects such an interpretation. He believes that the incest taboo was erected by society for the very reason that there was no biological barrier sufficient to prevent it. He says: "We are told that sexual attraction is diverted from the members of the opposite sex in one family owing to their living together from early childhood; or that a biological tendency against in-breeding has a mental equivalent in the horror of incest! Whereby it is entirely overlooked that no such rigorous prohibitions

¹ *Collected Papers.*

in law and custom would be required if any trustworthy natural barriers against the temptation to incest existed. The opposite is the truth."¹

Yet the biologically determined castration complex is precisely such a "trustworthy natural barrier" to incest. It is by reference to this inherent barrier that the repudiation of incest in the present-day boy is accounted for. In this account, there is no reference whatever to the "rigorous prohibitions in law and custom". Freud's rejection of the theories of Ellis and Westermarck applies equally well to his own. The incest taboo is not a social creation at all, but exists previously in the mind of the isolated individual. Such is Freud's implication.

Freud's answer may well be that although the incest taboo is now a biological barrier, it was originally a product of society and that he has in fact accounted for the social creation of this taboo in earlier times. To-day the individual is able to recapitulate biologically what was originally an historical product. He says: "Most probably they (these infant loves) pass because their time is over, because the children have entered upon a new phase of development in which they are compelled to recapitulate from the history of mankind the repression of an incestuous object-choice, just as at an earlier stage they were obliged to effect an object-choice of that very sort."²

Man in a state of nature, so runs the Freudian version of Darwin's hypothesis, lived in hordes, consisting of a single grown male with his wife or wives and their children. The old male protected the group from outside enemies. It was for this reason that the mother with her children remained with him in spite of his character which was in the highest degree forbidding. He was a vicious tyrannical beast who kept his wife and children in utter subjection. In particular, he was confronted by the task of jealously guarding his wife and daughters from the sexual approaches of his sons. And as these sons matured, it was

¹ *General Introduction to Psychoanalysis.*

² *Collected Papers.*

perhaps necessary to expel them from the group. So utterly despotic was he that a Victorian father might well have envied his authority.

The sons were in an oedipus situation of somewhat exaggerated intensity. On the one hand, they loved their mother and sisters and wished to perform incest upon them. On the other, they were jealous of and afraid of their father. Their hatred and fear were not, in the primal horde, repressed, but only concealed. The repressed aspect of their ambivalent feeling for their father was their affection. How they should ever come to have an affection for this conscienceless brutal beast can only be explained in accordance with the principle that children have a natural love for their fathers, however unwarranted such a feeling may be.

This natural love, however, was completely dominated by the hatred. "One day the expelled brothers joined forces, slew and ate the father, and thus put an end to the father horde. Together they dared and accomplished what would have remained impossible for them singly."¹

In the absence of any "trustworthy natural barrier" to incest, we should expect the brothers to proceed at once to take advantage of the women for whose favours they have committed so great a "crime". If a social taboo is the force which restrains incestuous impulses and that taboo has not yet been erected, we should expect the brothers to be checked by no barrier at all. Do the brothers proceed to put into effect their strongest desires? They do not. They begin to feel sorrow for the father and guilt for the "crime" and they sit down to draw up a social contract!

"After they had satisfied their hate by his removal," says Freud, "and had carried out their wish for identification with him, the suppressed tender impulses had to assert themselves. This took place in the form of remorse, a sense of guilt was formed which coincided here with the remorse generally felt. . . . What the father's presence had formerly

¹ *Totem and Taboo.*

prevented they themselves now prohibited in the psychic situation of 'subsequent obedience' which we know so well from psychoanalysis." The brothers "renounced the fruits of their deed by denying themselves the liberated women".¹

It is perfectly easy to see that there *was* a "trustworthy natural barrier" to incest. It is this natural barrier which gives rise to the social taboo. Freud is unable to account for the creation of the first social institution without assuming its previous existence in the minds of the isolated brothers.

That Freud is unable to account for society without assuming the previous existence of society is betrayed by a careless remark. Why had the sons not committed the patricide some generations before? Why did the deed occur at a particular period and no earlier? Because, suggests Freud, "perhaps some advance in culture, like the use of a new weapon, had given them the feeling of superiority".² If we consider that Freud is attempting to account for the first step in culture, the previous appearance of this "new weapon" is seen to be the most fantastic anachronism. But it is no more so than all of the other characteristics which he attributes to a state of nature.

Freud himself appears to be dissatisfied with his explanation for he supplements it with another. Perhaps the brothers did not at once repudiate the females but entered into many bitter struggles with each other for them. Each brother, after the primal murder, was "the other's rival for the women. Each wanted to have them all to himself like the father, and in the fight of each against the other (shades of Hobbes!) the new organization would have perished. For there was no longer any one stronger than all the rest who could have successfully assumed the role of the father. Thus there was nothing left for the brothers, if they wanted to live together, but to erect the incest prohibition—perhaps after many difficult experiences—

¹ *Totem and Taboo*.

² *Ibid*.

through which they all equally renounced the women whom they desired, and on account of whom they had removed the father in the first place".¹

Why was there "nothing left for the brothers" except to renounce the women? Freud's answer is that their jealousy prevented any other arrangement. But sexual jealousy, even presuming it to be an inevitable trait of human nature, can be overcome by brothers in such circumstances as examples of fraternal polyandry show. There is only one difference between the situation of the primal brothers and that of the males in Toda society, for example. With the latter, the sisters or other women whom the brothers marry in common were not their own sisters. The only factor, then, which could have prevented the primal brothers from instituting a similar system of fraternal polyandry with their own sisters is an innate repugnance to incest. The social taboo upon which they agreed was only the externalization of an internal barrier which like the "new weapon" existed previously to the formation of society.

What was this "trustworthy natural barrier"? It must of course have been the castration complex about which we seem to have forgotten. This complex, we are informed, was impressed upon the human germ plasm as a phylogenetic character previous to the breakup of the horde by the violent actions of the primal father. "We have conjectured," says Freud, "that, in the early days of the human family, castration really was performed on the growing boy by the jealous and cruel father. . . ."² The deeds of the father impressed upon the genetic material the fear of castration which must have been present in the minds of the primal brothers.³ It must have been this complex which gave rise to the externalizing of the taboo against incest.

¹ *Totem and Taboo.*

² *New Introductory Lectures.*

³ It must have occurred to Freud that the castrated sons could not have passed their fear onto their children! He might rest his case upon those who escaped actual castration.

But Freud scorns, as we have seen, the idea that the horror of incest is biological. He would like to demonstrate that this repugnance is "not to be sought in the psychology of the individual".¹ He would like to show how it arose out of the functioning of a group in opposition to individual desires, but since his analysis begins with isolated individuals, he can form a society only out of their agreement. And the agreement must proceed from desires which are present in the individuals in advance. No matter how elaborate the speculation, it is impossible upon these premises to avoid the assumption of a "trustworthy natural barrier" to incest, and the rigorous prohibitions against it in law and custom remain unintelligible.

"It is easy to perceive," says Malinowski correctly, "that the primal horde has been equipped with all the bias, maladjustments, and ill-temper of a middle-class European family, and then let loose in a prehistoric jungle to run riot in a most attractive but fantastic hypothesis."²

The cult of the isolated individual abolishes not alone sociology. It tends ultimately to the abolition of psychology itself as a science, connected with, but different from, biology. If psychology is the biology of the individual homo sapiens in society, then with the theoretical disappearance of the concrete social field, psychology itself must disappear likewise and become reduced to biology. Characteristics which at first appear to be contingent upon particular individual experiences in society and belonging to certain personalities only, are discovered to be common to all individuals in our society. But to a bourgeois, our society does not differ essentially from society in general. The characteristic in question is attributed to the effect of "culture" irrespective of its historical changes. Finally, even this concession to society must disappear. Is not culture itself only the product of individual psychology? Therefore what was formerly considered to be

¹ *General Introduction to Psychoanalysis.*

² B. Malinowski, *Sex and Repression in Savage Society.*

the result in the individual of particular social experiences is ultimately thought to exist previous to culture and in fact to be its source.

So it is with the castration complex. A clearer view of this progression can be observed in Freud's treatment of the most immediate consequence of the castration complex, the latency period.

The castration complex produces a twofold result. "The whole process, on the one hand, preserves the genital organ, wards off the danger of losing it; on the other hand, it paralyzes it, takes away its function from it. This process introduces the latency period which interrupts the child's sexual development."¹ It would seem reasonable to believe that if we are able to discover peoples who experience no latency period, this would prove that they had not come under the influence of the castration complex.

The latency period extends from about the end of the fourth year until the first manifestations of puberty at about eleven. It is characterized by an almost complete cessation of sexual interests and activity. Infantile sexuality undergoes repression and complete amnesia for the earlier period sets in. The sexual interests are in part sublimated into socially approved activities and partly employed to set up reaction-formations of shame, disgust and morality.²

These barriers against sex are apt to become factors in producing pathological phenomena at puberty, and even "normally" produce the "crisis of puberty". They are formed in response to the supposed danger of castration as punishment for sexual activity and they continue to exist and will confront the renewed sexuality of puberty. It may consequently come about that these later impulses, instead of being compatible with the ego, will be regarded as constituting a danger and will be forced to follow the infantile impulses into repression with pathological results.

¹ *Collected Papers.*

² See *Ibid.*

While the latency period is "an essential part of the predisposition to neurosis",¹ it is also the prerequisite of those cultural and ethical strivings which contribute to the further development of civilization. The blocked sexual impulses are turned into scientific and artistic channels.²

Freud did not always believe the latency period to be a universal characteristic of human nature. In 1915 he stated explicitly that "this latency period may be absent".³ He spoke of the "conditions which make this delay possible".⁴ At that time, he regarded the conditions to be the suppression of sex and this he found to be characteristic of bourgeois families in particular.⁵ The suppression, he suggested, would lead to greater possibility of neurosis amongst upper classes, but also to higher cultural attainment.

Therefore, while regarding the latency period as the source of many cultural attainments, he also considered this sexless period to be the *product* of social forces. He even ventured to explain society's motive, but already, in this explanation, can be seen the identification of bourgeois society with society in general. "At bottom," he said, "society's motive is economic; since it has not means enough to support life for its members without work on their part, it must see to it that the number of these members is restricted and their energies directed away from sexual activities onto their work—the eternal primordial struggle for existence, therefore, persisting to the present day."⁶

To regard the suppression of sex as, in part, a birth-control measure, and to imply that the sexual impulses of primitives, like our own, are directed away from sexual activities, is, of course, the purest apologetics. But we are not here concerned with the correctness of Freud's analysis

¹ *Collected Papers.*

² See *General Introduction to Psychoanalysis.*

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Collected Papers.*

⁵ See *General Introduction to Psychoanalysis.*

⁶ *Ibid.*

of society's motives. It is enough for our purpose to see that he believed the latency period to be the product of society.

Inexorably the concept of the isolated individual drives Freud back into the genetic material. It will not surprise us to find that more recently the latency period has come to be regarded as a phylogenetic characteristic inherited by man independently of his social milieu. This assumption has in fact become so certain that the appearance of the latency period in man is now regarded as the very *evidence* for the existence of phylogenetic characters.

The phylogenetic factor, says Freud, "is one which we merely infer; but a very remarkable fact of libido development has compelled us to assume its existence. We find that the sexual life of the human being does not develop in progressive fashion from incipience to maturity, as in the case of most of the closely related animals, but that it suffers an abrupt interruption after an initial early florescence extending to about the fifth year, after which it commences anew with puberty, dovetailing, as it were, with the tendencies of the infantile period. We believe that something momentous to the destinies of the human species must have taken place which has left behind as an historical precipitate this interruption of sexual development".¹

What was this momentous event? "According to the view of one psychoanalyst, the last-mentioned phenomenon, which seems to be peculiar to man, is a heritage of the cultural development necessitated by the glacial epoch."² In this case the characteristic would have been acquired after the events of the primal horde. Whether Freud accepts this interpretation or not, he does not say. There is no need for him to do so, for he has himself postulated an explanation which would have produced the latency period even before the family row which gave rise to society. In many of his discussions, Freud appears to forget that the latency period is the immediate consequence of the

¹ *The Problem of Anxiety*, pp. 130-1.

² *Ego and Id*, cited by Wittels.

castration complex. And this complex, brought about by the violent actions of the primal father, would have produced the latency period in his sons even before they removed him. In either case, we observe the tendency of the bourgeois to search for "momentous" changes in an almost unimaginable past or in the almost unimaginably distant future.

It is unnecessary to go back even so far as the last glacial period to discover societies in which the boys go through no latency period at all. Such societies exist to-day. Margaret Mead has shown that no such phenomenon occurs in Samoa.¹ Here, sexual activity in children is not at all suppressed. They are encouraged to engage in sexual play from infancy. The onset of puberty does not come as the "second thrust" of sex after a period of latency, and there is no crisis at this time. The same state of affairs has been observed amongst the Trobrianders by Malinowski,² by Schapera among the Bakata, a Bantu tribe,³ and by the psychoanalyst Roheim in Central Australia.⁴ Anthropological literature is full of similar examples less carefully observed. So, when Freud says that "of all living creatures, man alone seems to show this double onset of sexual growth" we must either conclude that these primitive peoples are not a part of the human race or that this is true of "man" only under certain social conditions.

What are these conditions? What social forces produce the castration complex and the temporary abolition of sexual behaviour? The answer to this question can only come from a serious comparative study of children under various social conditions, a study which has only begun within recent years. In the meantime, it appears from the investigations of Freud himself that the castration complex is contingent upon two main interlocking social conditions. "The castration complex," says Freud, is "the reaction to

¹ M. Mead, *Coming of Age in Samoa* (Cape).

² *Sex and Repression in Savage Society*.

³ See Isaacs, *Social Development in Young Children* (Routledge).

⁴ Géza Roheim, "Psychoanalysis and Anthropology" in *Psychoanalysis Today: Its Scope and Function*, edited by Sándor Lorand (Allen & Unwin).

that intimidation in the field of sex or to that restraint of early infantile sexual activity which is ascribed to the father."¹

The first condition then is the suppression of sex as such. When this suppression does not exist, the latency period does not appear, and this is true even where threats of castration occur in connection with other matters.²

The other condition is that the sexual intimidation be assimilated to the father as the representative in the family of authority. That is, the castration complex depends upon the existence of the patriarchal family.

These two social phenomena are indeed closely intertwined with each other and with the existence of classes, not only as they exist in our own society, but also in their origins. The first demands for the complete abnegation of sex arose through the imposition of chastity upon the women by men who had acquired proprietary rights over them. In primitive societies where the males have not yet, through the acquisition of property, particularly in domesticated animals, acquired such proprietary rights, and women are freest, there is no obligation upon them to be chaste. There is no restriction upon sexual activity as such. There are people who are not sexually available to each other, but there are also plenty who are and sexual activity from infancy is the rule.

With the social development of the means of production, the men as hunters usually fall heir to the herds of domesticated animals when these begin to be part of the wealth of society. The men use this power to gain proprietary rights over women, a process which disintegrates the primitive maternal clans and begins the evolution of patriarchal family life. Even where no dominating pastoral stage develops, the growth of agriculture, setting men free from the necessity of daily hunting, leads ultimately to the domination of the male. As the right of inheritance becomes, at the same time and for the same reasons, of greater importance, the male becomes concerned with getting a

¹ *General Introduction to Psychoanalysis.*

² See Isaacs, *Social Development in Young Children.*

legitimate heir. He becomes more meticulous about leaving property to offspring not his own. He wants a male heir of his own flesh and blood. This demand requires the fidelity of his wife or wives, a fidelity which in time begins to be extended to the period before marriage. The commercial value of virginity increases and becomes ultimately a sentimental demand for virginity. Sexual abstinence begins to be demanded of females from birth.

These demands are the consequence of the development of private property in the means of production and do not immediately influence those without such property. We must not lose sight of the connection between the dominance of men over women and that of one class over another. "The first class oppression," said Engels, coincides "with that of the female by the male sex."¹ This connection is particularly clear with regard to our own Western tradition. "The contest between the plebeians and patricians which occupies so considerable a place in early Roman history," says Briffault, "is not merely part of the eternal conflict between Disraeli's 'two nations', the poor and the rich, but also a conflict between the two forms of organization of human society, the primitive matriarchal order and the later patriarchal order, brought about by the development of property."²

The emergence of class society and with it the dominance of the male, brings the suppression of sex in the life of females. As yet there is no reference to purity or chastity in the life of the male. This demand for male purity and the consequent suppression of all sex attained importance only through the introduction of Christianity in the special historical conditions which made its acceptance possible. Sexual asceticism in the male is, even in some primitive groups, considered efficacious in driving away or palliating evil spirit influences. It is regarded as the special merit of a few individuals who gain by this abstinence great spiritual power. Sexual activity is the normal behaviour.

¹ F. Engels, *Origin of the Family*, p. 79.

² R. Briffault, *The Mothers*.

Chastity is a special virtue. Only under the influence of Christianity have men come to regard the lack of chastity as a sin. "Not until Christianity had extended beyond the Palestinian country-side to populous Roman cities," says Briffault, "did the conception of sexual purity assume a significance unknown in any previous stage of the world's history."¹ Only then was male chastity elevated to a necessity comparable in stringency with the demand for feminine purity. The complete suppression of sex became a social demand.

There can be no doubt that the early Christian fathers desired to abolish sex completely. There were to be no exceptions, even matrimony being regarded as unholy. "The married life is treated as absolutely unlawful."² Castration as a surgical operation upon zealous Christians was performed very frequently in spite of a Roman law forbidding it.³ "Ambrose and Tertullian declared that the extinction of the human race was preferable to its propagation by sexual intercourse."⁴ It was some time before the Roman church came to compromise with sin and to enshrine it in Holy Matrimony.

The attempt to impose such a morality upon the European barbarians was unsuccessful. "Christian ascetic morality remained for the most part a dead letter."⁵ The rise of the burghers against the aristocracy and the church, however, and the fusion of bourgeois individualism with Christian morality, led to a revival of the earlier Jewish patriarchal ideals and the moral fanatical anti-vice attitudes. The Christian doctrine that sex is sin became a savage Puritanical "categorical imperative" assimilated to the authority of the father.

If the castration complex is "the reaction to that intimidation in the field of sex or to that restraint of early infantile

¹ R. Briffault, *The Mothers*.

² G. Salmon, *A Historical Introduction to the Study of the Books of the New Testament*, p. 327, cited by Briffault, *ibid*.

³ R. Briffault, *op. cit*.

⁴ *Ibid*.

⁵ R. Briffault, *Sin and Sex* (Allen & Unwin).

sexual activity which is ascribed to the father", then clearly it is not at all an inborn character common to humanity, but an historical product. The task of Marxism is not to deny the existence of such a complex, but to trace its development by tracing the conditions upon which it depends.

CHAPTER VI

CLASS SOCIETY AND THE SUPEREGO

WHILE FREUD FRANKLY regards as independent of society what we may call for convenience the driving forces of the individual, with regard to the restraining forces, he makes the most serious attempts to draw the social order into the structure of his theory. We have already noted his failure to do so adequately and have followed his retreat into the germ plasm. Society recedes like a mirage before each advance of his isolated individual and finally disappears altogether. It will nevertheless be worth our while to follow him more closely in his account of the internalizing of the social barriers.

The organism begins, he believes, in obedience to its instinctive urges, by seeking pleasure and avoiding pain.¹ As we learned in considering the id, instincts are impulsive; they demand immediate satisfaction; they are devoid of foresight and planning capacity. Obviously, such instinctive thoughtless striving for pleasure must often bring the organism into situations of grave danger. If the organism is to continue to exist, it must learn by experience to postpone the satisfaction of its desires when these involve danger or threaten pain. The impulsive urges of the sexual instinct come into conflict with the interests of self-preservation, and under the influence of these latter urges, the organism learns circumspection and caution. The id becomes modified by its relation to the outside world and this modification is called the "ego".

"On behalf of the id," says Freud, "the ego controls the path of access to motility, but it interpolates between

¹ As we shall see in Chapter vii, this assumption has more recently been revised.

desire and action the procrastinating factor of thought, during which it makes use of the residues of experience stored up in memory. In this way it dethrones the pleasure-principle, and substitutes for it the reality-principle, which promises greater security and greater success."¹

It must be emphasized that, supposedly, the ego does not develop in relation to specifically social factors. The "reality" which Freud continually invokes to explain the ego is a quite undifferentiated abstract "external world" common to all forms of life. This abstract reality is only the representation of difficulties and dangers in general. No distinction is made between the physical barriers confronting animal life in a state of nature, and the social barriers confronting man. Even the elementary fact that the "residues of experience stored up in memory" include, for human beings, the experiences of others of the present and of all past generations is left out of consideration in the account of the simple ego.

It is only in relation to society that organisms acquire the ability and are confronted by the necessity for the *self-imposition* of taboos. Repression does not occur in animals. It is exclusively a social phenomenon. It does not surprise us therefore to find that Freud does not attribute to the simple ego either the capacity or the desire for repressing the id impulse. Only in the presence of actual danger does the ego restrain the id. It is at bottom in favour of the id impulses. It is only concerned that gratification shall be attained without injury to the organism.

While the ego is common to men and to "much simpler forms of life", the antagonism between the ego and the id exists only in man.² Even in man, this antagonism does not develop until social morality has been embodied in the individual as conscience. And conscience is not a function of the simple ego, but of a later differentiation of the ego called the superego. In dealing with the simple ego we are still alone in the desert. Social reality as distinct

¹ *New Introductory Lectures.*

² *General Introduction to Psychoanalysis.*

from abstract physical reality plays no part until the formation of the superego. Even in accounting for this explicitly social function, Freud finds it wellnigh impossible to get himself out of the germ plasm into the stream of history.

"Conscience," he says, "is no doubt something within us, but it has not been there from the beginning. In this sense it is the opposite of sexuality, which is certainly present from the very beginning of life, and is not a thing that only comes in later. But small children are notoriously a-moral. They have no internal inhibitions against their pleasure-seeking impulses. The role which the superego undertakes later in life, is at first played by an external power, by parental authority. The influence of the parents dominates the child by granting proofs of affection and by threats of punishment, which, to the child, mean loss of love, and which must also be feared on their own account. This objective anxiety is the forerunner of the later moral anxiety; so long as the former is dominant one need not speak of superego or of conscience. It is only later that the secondary situation arises, which we are far too ready to regard as the normal state of affairs; the external restrictions are introjected, so that the superego takes the place of the parental function, and thenceforward observes, guides and threatens the ego in just the same way as the parents acted to the child before."¹

We will remember that when the little boy finds himself in a position of rivalry with his father and is in danger, as he supposes, of castration, his only solution is to give up his sexual impulses for his mother and his antagonism for his father. He can only do this by identifying himself with his father and turning his own hostility against himself. By this act of identification, he internalizes the parental function which becomes a part of himself, a region of his personality, the superego. The prohibitions which formerly could be enforced only in the presence of the threat of punishment are now self-imposed. In the superego, joined

¹ *New Introductory Lectures.*

with the hostility which he now turns upon himself, the child now carries with him the threat of castration which previously had to come from the outside. "Just as the superego is the father become impersonalized, so the dread of the castration which he threatened has been converted into indefinite social anxiety or dread of conscience."¹

So far, we have not had to mention society. The father we have spoken of might be the primal father in a state of nature. But suddenly we realize that the father is a social father, the embodiment of social morality. The superego "becomes the vehicle of tradition and of all the age-long values which have been handed down *in this way* from generation to generation".² The development of the superego is synonymous with socialization. A person without a superego, and therefore presumably a child under five years of age, would be "not at all socialized".³

It is easy to recognize here the social contract all over again. The child develops not only his id, but also his ego independently of society. He grows up in a sort of artificial state of nature which is contingent upon Freud's abstraction of every vestige of social life from the "external world". Only later does the child identify himself with his father who represents social reality, and by this action agrees to submit himself to social law. "The ego does not feel at all comfortable when it finds itself sacrificed in this way to the needs of society."⁴ Only at this point is the child's personality definitely altered by the fact that he was born into society instead of into the forest primeval.

Repression is, as we have already said, if anything is, derived in the first place from society. If the superego is, as Freud appears to maintain, the only inlet into the personality of social traditions, we must agree with him that the superego is the absolute condition for repression. Even before the explicit formulation of the superego con-

¹ *The Problem of Anxiety*, p. 85.

² *New Introductory Lectures*.

³ Healy, Bronner, Bowers, *Structure and Meaning of Psychoanalysis*. —

⁴ *New Introductory Lectures*.

cept, Freud made it clear that repression was not and could not be a function of the simple ego, but only of the "moral and aesthetic tendencies in the ego".¹ These tendencies were at that time comprised in the term, "ego-ideal", and Freud stated: "From the point of view of the ego this formation of an ideal would be the condition of repression".² Now that the superego has become an established region of the person, the same conclusion is expressed still more clearly. "We can say," says Freud, "that repression is the work of the superego—either that it does its work on its own account or else that the ego does it in obedience to its orders."³

By reaching this logical conclusion of his premises, Freud, a past-master at plunging society into insoluble dilemmas, plunges into one all by himself. If the superego is indeed the condition of repression, repression must not occur until the formation of the superego. Unfortunately Freud has observed that this is not the case. Repression does occur before the formation of the superego. In fact, when the oedipus complex develops, "repression has already begun in the child and has withdrawn from him some part of his sexual aims".⁴

There are, Freud says, two kinds of repression, primary and subsequential. Primary repression (and this seems to be its main distinction) takes place prior to the erection of the superego. "At all events," he says, "the first, and very intense attacks of anxiety occur prior to the differentiation of the superego."⁵

In short, social morality, which had been relegated to the later formation of the superego, is observed to be taking effect long before this differentiation. Freud, who thought he had been able to bring his child up neatly, untouched by society, finds definite signs of social influence where nothing should exist except the natural man. In

¹ See *Ego and Id*.

² *Collected Papers*.

³ *New Introductory Lectures*.

⁴ *General Introduction to Psychoanalysis*.

⁵ *The Problem of Anxiety*, p. 24.

the face of this contradiction, he begins to withdraw his assertions about the function of the superego. "One easily runs the risk," he says, "of overestimating the role of the superego in repression."¹ We must insist however, that if the traditional social and moral values are passed on from generation to generation through the medium of the superego, then this region is the inescapable condition of repression.

For Freud, the dilemma is a real one and he is driven back to the postulation of organic repressions, purely biological and dependent upon the strength of a stimulus or the intensity of an instinctual impulse. "It is entirely reasonable," he writes, "to suppose that quantitative factors, such as a stimulus of excessive strength, with the failure of the safety device protective against too powerful stimuli are the most direct causation of primal repression."²

What this "safety device" is, it is hard to imagine. Freud never, so far as I know, mentions it again. But many times he refers to these "organic repressions". Particularly in *Civilization and Its Discontents* are various evolutionary speculations adduced to account for several alleged innate repressions. "Only the later repressions," he says elsewhere, "display the mechanism which we have described, in which anxiety is called forth as a signal of an earlier danger-situation; the earliest and most fundamental repressions arise directly from traumatic factors, where the ego comes into contact with an excessive libidinal demand."³ Freud would lead us to believe that the ego regards the "excessive" libidinal demand as *danger in itself* in spite of the fact that it has never brought the organism into a painful or dangerous external situation. But as we learn from Freud himself, no libidinal demand, however excessive, can itself lead to repression, for "frightening *instinctual* situations can in the last resort be traced back to *external* situations of danger."⁴

¹ *The Problem of Anxiety*, p. 24.

² *New Introductory Lectures*.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.*

One would think from Freud's account that the child's acquisition of "tradition" and "age-long values" begins for the first time upon his identification with his father at the age of five, and that language which he has already acquired long before this time, is incapable of transmitting to him any traditional values. If this is the assumption, if the ego as well as the id is to be regarded as the natural man, it is not astonishing that a new dilemma should present itself.

Only if the superego is regarded as the sole repository of social morality does the previous appearance of social morality become a mystery. If the ego is regarded as fully as much a social product as the superego and also capable of repression, the dilemma disappears. Nor is it necessary to solve the difficulty, as some psychoanalysts have,¹ by assuming that the superego really begins to develop much earlier than Freud supposes. To the ego may be referred the primary repressions, and to the combined ego and superego, the subsequential repressions.

Here, once more, we have observed that the elimination of society results in the abolition of psychology, the reduction of a psychological mechanism, repression, to pure biology.

Even the superego moreover, which is of all the regions of the mind explicitly social, becomes so not as the logical consequence of Freud's theory, but as the consequence of his exasperated determination to get society in somehow. He traces the development of the child in an abstract environment in which the father himself appears only as a physical father, differing in no essential respect from the primal father. He exists only as an "external power". In the presence of this imaginary creature, the little boy "naturally" repudiates his sexual impulses like the good little Christian he really is. Only at this point does Freud seem to realize to his chagrin that he has accounted for the whole personality without once referring to tradition and culture, much less the social relationships. But

¹ Susan Isaacs and Melanie Klein.

where are these facts to fit in? Although not a necessary consequence of his theory, Freud simply asserts that this father is the embodiment of social tradition.

Freud does not appear to be wholly satisfied with his account, and since his premises make it impossible for him to grasp any more thoroughly the place of society in individual development, he retreats once again to the infallible, but already overstuffed genes. Just as he was forced to ascribe primary repression to the biological organism in isolation, so he tends to regard even the subsequential repressions of the superego as phylogenetically determined. He is inclined, though he might not insist, to attribute the moral and aesthetic tendencies, the "higher nature" of man characterizing the superego, to heredity. He says: "The ethical strivings of mankind . . . are an acquisition accompanying evolution; they have then become the hereditary possession of those human beings alive to-day though unfortunately in a very variable measure."¹ In another place, he speaks of the "moral acquisitions" being developed by the male of the human species and transmitted to the female by "cross-inheritance".² For Freud, nothing exists beside nature and man. Society is for him as it was for Ludwig Feuerbach,³ a closed book.

Now we have a problem of our own to solve. If the ego is a social product and, like the superego, capable of repression, what is the difference between these two regions of the mind and why is there a split between them? Let us examine the superego more carefully.

Freud demarcates all three regions of the personality clearly. "From the point of view of morality, the control and restriction of instinct," he says, "it may be said of the

¹ *Collected Papers*.

² See *Ego and Id*.

³ It is not surprising to find a follower of Freud, Fritz Wittels, harking back to this pupil of Hegel's who first repudiated his idealism. Since Freud has warned his followers not to attempt to build any *Weltanschauung* upon the basis of psychoanalysis, Wittels says: "Therefore a philosopher by profession, unjustly decried as a materialist, namely Ludwig Feuerbach, shall speak for us." See *Freud and His Times*, p. 58.

id that it is totally non-moral, of the ego that it strives to be moral and of the superego that it can be hypermoral and then becomes as ruthless as only the id can be."¹

This hypermorality and self-punishment, which is in its most severe aspects unconscious, comes to the surface clearly in certain forms of mental disorder, notably in melancholic attacks. In such cases, the patient's superego "becomes over-severe, abuses, humiliates, and ill-treats his unfortunate ego, threatens it with the severest punishments, reproaches it for long forgotten actions which were at the time regarded quite lightly, and behaves as though it had spent the whole interval in amassing complaints and was only waiting for its present increase in strength to bring them forward, and to condemn the ego on their account. The superego has the ego at its mercy and applies the most severe moral standards to it; indeed it represents the whole demands of morality, and we see all at once that our moral sense of guilt is the expression of the tension between the ego and the superego."²

The superego has a twofold aspect. It is an ideal demanding that "you *ought to be* such and such (like your father)" and at the same time a prohibition that "you must not be such and such (like your father) that is, you may not do all that he does; many things are his prerogative".³

We have previously noted that the child's acceptance of these demands and prohibitions as a part of himself is accomplished by his identification of himself with his father. This explanation is not quite correct. The child does not identify himself with his father as he actually exists, but with his father as he should be and is presumed to be but is not. The child internalizes not his actual father, but his idealized father and the moral standards to which his father is presumed to adhere to strictly. He takes over bodily his father's *superego*.⁴

¹ *Ego and Id.*

² *New Introductory Lectures.*

³ *Ego and Id.*

⁴ *New Introductory Lectures.*

This ideal standard of conduct and morality is in the highest degree irrational. It is not an ideal clearly separated from reality which one should strive ultimately to realize. Like the id, it demands immediate compliance. It is not a rational guide to moral behaviour. Its demands, prohibitions and ideals are not only in sharp contradiction with the immoral impulses which grow out of actual life, but also with the morality which is actually in practice. The latter is possible of attainment under existing conditions. The ideals of the superego are impossible under any conditions, but this contradiction between the super-morality and actual practical morality is unacknowledged. The superego prescribes as the norm a nobility and purity which is impossible and indeed undesirable, and then lacerates the poor ego for failing to live up to this norm. *The superego is a hypocritical moral standard enforced by irrational authority.* We may well ask if such a region of the personality is a permanent fixture in human beings.

The superego is the heir of the oedipus complex.¹ Although it is opposed to the oedipus desires and represses them, it nevertheless grows into being out of that very complex. We have suggested that the conditions under which the oedipus complex is formed and repressed are patriarchal dominance combined with the Christian creed that sex is sin. We also noted that the development of patriarchal authority is bound up inextricably with the development of classes and is in our society the product and support of bourgeois class relations. We must now ask ourselves what the relation is between such social conditions and the hypocritical moral standard of the superego which is enforced by irrational authority. Is there any relation between a patriarchal class society and the fact that an impossible ideal becomes accepted as reality and is enforced as such?

No society which depends upon the exploitation of one class by another and of female by male can maintain itself by force alone. In such a system, force must be supple-

¹ See *New Introductory Lectures*.

mented by and is intimately bound up with deception and self-deception. Those who are exploited remain in their inferior positions not alone through physical fear, but because they themselves accept the social relations which degrade them. This acceptance is a necessary part of their degradation. But in adjusting themselves to the injustices, the brutalities, the moral and physical agonies of such a system, both exploited and exploiters, as certain reactionary philosophers contend, accept "fictions". They act "as if" these fictions corresponded with reality. For the "as if" philosophers, the ability of such fictions to maintain the established social relations intact is the ultimate criterion of their truth!

The exploitation, the unnecessary suffering, the cruel absurdities of everyday life must be made to seem as acceptable to everyone as they *really are* to the ruling classes. The distorted view of the rulers which sees perfection in a society of which it appropriates the benefits tends to penetrate the obscurist hovel. Euphemisms, illusory ideals, fine names, noble principles and outright denials must spread their wings over the whole repulsive mess. What *is* must be denied; what is evil must be made to appear in a good light; what is trivial must be elevated to importance; what is tawdry and vicious must be glorified; what is irrational must be rationalized; and what threatens must be called the work of the devil. For those miseries which cannot be concealed, glossed over or eradicated, consolations must be offered in the form of illusory religious beliefs and practices. And this entire mass of obfuscation, confusion, lies, fraud, high morality and crocodile tears must be accepted as sober reality!

The whole of intellectual history is the story of such falsifications of thought in the interests of class power.¹ Over periods of time, the truth in certain respects may correspond with the interests of a particular class. But inevitably as conditions change and the transitory nature of the new ruling class becomes manifest, the continued

¹ See Briffault, *Rational Evolution*, for an excellent treatment.

maintenance of its power requires the distortion of every thought and feeling. It is not that human beings are inculcated with false doctrines which they are so stupid as to believe. It is not even that the ruling classes themselves are deliberate falsifiers although this becomes increasingly necessary for them. The whole organization of an exploiting society, the very conditions of existence, the contradictions and confusions all make for the development and acceptance of false conceptions of reality.

This whole process has become extremely clear to us in our epoch of social revolution. The material conditions of the proletariat force it increasingly to break through the vast mass of apologetic thought and feeling. It is beginning to face unwaveringly the necessity for the destruction of existing class relations and to consider the problem of the reorganization of society without benefit of the bourgeoisie.

This very awakening necessitates for the bourgeoisie still deeper plunges into the muddy waters of mysticism. It must justify to itself and to the rest of society the excesses which it commits in its attempt to maintain an authority which is no longer simply irrational, but is rapidly becoming impossible. It must redouble its efforts to confuse the issues since intellectual clarity is one condition of successful proletarian revolution. Finally, in order to conceal from itself the inevitability of its impending fate, it must hedge itself in with illusions on every side.

However exaggerated and fantastic this process appears under fascism, the split between what is presumed to exist and what does exist, between what one should or should not do and what is actually done, in short, the separation of theory from practice, is the inevitable outcome and necessary condition of existence of every exploiting system. This stultifying separation permeates the system from the larger social issues to the most minute actions of individual persons. The separation of theory from practice is the very connective tissue of an exploiting society.

The domination of the father in the family, like the

domination of the bourgeoisie in society as a whole, requires for its continued maintenance the acceptance as truth of ideals which conflict with reality. That children should love, honour and obey their parents, particularly their father, is the condition of the perfect maintenance in harmony of the patriarchal monogamous family. The very situation which demands such behaviour, and in part produces it, creates also its very opposite. The child loves and hates its parents at the same time, but this hostility, like the sexuality with which it is so closely connected, must remain unacknowledged. "We must distinguish," says Freud, "between the traditional standard of conduct, the filial piety expected in this relation, and what daily observation shows us to be the fact."¹ This traditional standard is not at all distinguished in the minds of the participants from the realities of the situation. It is not a rational ideal set up beside a recognized fact. It is itself accepted as a fact. Just as "the ideal has been to make the child's life asexual, and in the course of time it has come to this that it is really believed to be asexual",² so the child's hostility for his father disappears before the "profound hypocrisy" of the bourgeois family. In its interest, theory must not be allowed to correspond with fact. Any assertion that the child's feelings are not all they should be calls forth screams of indignation. The child learns to accept the ideal in the place of truth. He represses his sexual impulses by opposing to them the bourgeois Christian ideal of "purity". He represses his hostile impulses toward his father by opposing to them an ideal of nobility, justice and morality which would put Sir Galahad himself to shame.

What becomes of this repressed and undisposed hostility? A paradox leads Freud to the answer. "If the parents have really ruled with a rod of iron," he says, "we can easily understand the child developing a severe superego, but, contrary to our expectations, experience shows that the

¹ *Interpretation of Dreams.*

² *General Introduction to Psychoanalysis.*

superego may reflect the same relentless harshness even when the upbringing has been gentle and kind, and avoided threats and punishment as far as possible."¹

Where does the aggressiveness of the superego toward the ego come from? Freud's answer is that it comes from the child himself. When he is forced to renounce his hostility for his father, there is nothing that he can do with it but turn it against himself. Unconscious and unrecognized hostility cannot be utilized consciously. It can find no rational outlet. It turns against the ego in conjunction with the ideal standards with which it belongs from its origin and this conflict is expressed as an irrational sense of guilt or unconscious need for punishment. It torments the ego whether any act counter to the ideal standard of morality has been committed or not. It may in certain cases even drive an individual to commit an immoral or criminal action in order to provide a rational pretext for what is otherwise a blind and pointless self-criticism and self-punishment. As Dr. Frankwood Williams makes clear, this hostility is turned against the self because it is unrecognized. It must, he says, be made conscious and directed "away from persons onto things".²

The recognition and conscious handling of hostile impulses cannot however be brought about by admonitions. The hypocritical morality and the undisposed-of hostility are bound up inextricably with the patriarchal authority of the father, interwoven with the savage categorical imperative of Puritanism, and all together, set in a matrix of exploiting class relations. The superego, like religion to which it is intimately related, may be traced to the family. But as Marx said with reference to religion, "the chief thing still remains to be done". The family itself must "be theoretically criticized and radically changed in practice".³ The abolition of the irrational superego requires the reorganization of the whole of society. It is

¹ *New Introductory Lectures.*

² F. Williams, *Russia, Youth and the Present-Day World*, p. 64.

³ Marx, *Theses on Feuerbach*, IV (Lawrence & Wishart).

precisely the internalization of the "profound hypocrisy and inherent barbarism of bourgeois civilization".¹ It will not disappear until a new civilization rises upon the ruins of the old.

What of the Soviet Union where these conditions have been largely eliminated? "This system," said Lenin to Colonel Robbins, "is stronger than yours because it admits reality."² The remark, which was directly concerned with political differences between Soviet Russia and the United States, has a much wider application extending even into the cradle.

A society which is not founded upon exploitation can afford to be honest. Where the relations between one individual and all the rest are simple and direct, confusion is no longer necessary. When a system is rational, it does not have to protect itself with self-deceptions. Theory and practice can unite.

The moral code in the Soviet Union is the extension of the underlying social relations. There shall be no exploitation, neither of class by class, nor of wife by husband, nor of child by parents. This moral code is no illusory fiction, no hypocritical ideal. It grows out of the fact that exploitation in the Soviet Union is no longer necessary and is fast becoming impossible. The moral code is not an irrational, impossible, categorical, imperative. It is a guide to human relations. Its function is to reveal and make conscious, not to conceal the real relationships.

Under such circumstance, sex does not have to be repressed in favour of a fictitious purity. Hostility does not have to masquerade in saintly garb. Aggressive impulses which may be produced coincide with reason. Hate is directed towards those things which are hateful. No subterranean hostile urges need be turned against the individual himself. Aggressive impulses are directed from persons to things. No irrational sense of guilt, no

¹ Marx and Engels, *The Communist Manifesto* (Lawrence & Wishart).

² Quoted Rhys Williams, *The Soviets*, p. 45 (Harcourt, Brace and Company).

hypermoral hypocritical substitute for social conscience need arise. That this is true of the Soviet Union is not the testimony of Communists alone but of Dr. Frankwood Williams whose whole volume of essays and speeches may here be placed in evidence.

Dr. Williams was never able completely to rid himself of the conception that the complexes of infancy are invariable traits belonging to the nature of man. But he was penetrating and honest in his observations of the psychological changes which had taken place in the Soviet Union. He observed, not only that hostile impulses were being guided rationally instead of being turned into feelings of guilt, but that the hostile impulses themselves appeared to be disappearing altogether from the family relationships. "The thing I noticed at once, in these Russian family groups," he says, "was the lack of tension between members of the family. . . . There is genuine friendliness. These parents seem actually to like their children and the children seem actually to like their parents."¹

To the crucial question for Freudians; can human nature be changed, Frankwood Williams was beginning to answer, "yes".

¹ F. Williams, *Russia, Youth and the Present-Day World*, p. 142.

CHAPTER VII

THE WORLD WAR AND THE DEATH INSTINCT

FREUD'S MIND WAS moulded in the liberal capitalism of the last third of the nineteenth century and his thought begins with the premises of the bourgeois mechanism of that period. In spite of his many years of work in the twentieth century, he remains unmistakably a pre-imperialist thinker. If it be recalled that he was over forty years of age at the turn of the century, the fact is not surprising.

The silent growth of monopoly which was undermining the liberal epoch in which he matured and ushering in the final stage of capitalism left his fully formed viewpoint essentially untouched. It was only when the underlying process burst into full visibility as the first world war that there occurred the more hurried disintegration of his original mechanism and the completion of his transition to vitalism.

The distinction between the two periods can still be clearly observed in Freud's recent condemnation of the philosophical assumptions of his two former pupils, Jung and Adler. He utterly rejects the mysticism of the former, protesting against the explanation of psychological phenomena in terms of religion rather than the reverse. Even now, in the face of great discouragement, he retains his faith in the materialism to which every scientist, so long as he does not attempt to philosophize, intuitively adheres. Science, he says, aims "to arrive at correspondence with reality, that is to say with what exists outside us and independently of us, and as experience has taught us is decisive for the fulfilment or frustration of our desires.

This correspondence with the real external world we call truth".¹

Freud is equally opposed to the instrumentalism that Adler derives from Vaihinger, which in essence denies the possibility of knowing the objective world, insists upon the absolute relativity of truth and appears to maintain that we should believe anything, however fantastic, which enables us to adjust to reality *as it is*. Freud is aware of the social implications of such a theory. "Its use," he says, "is prompted by well-known reactionary currents of present-day feeling, which are hostile to science. . . ."² Furthermore, he delivers the correct answer to such obscurantism. "I will merely remark that the anarchistic theory only retains its remarkable air of superiority so long as it is concerned with opinions about abstract things; it breaks down the moment it comes in contact with practical life."³

In opposition to such reactionary tendencies, Freud proclaims that he will continue to abide by the philosophy of science. But what is the philosophy of science? In the opinion of Marxists, it is precisely dialectical materialism, and Freud is not a dialectical materialist. This does not mean that he has been unable to observe the dialectical character of many psychological phenomena. His observations continually confirm Marxism and, as we have seen, they batter constantly against the mechanical framework of his theory. But the framework *is* mechanical. That cannot be denied. In one of his latest essays Freud apologizes sincerely for his ignorance of Marxism and then proceeds to exhibit this ignorance in full. It would indeed be remarkable if, at this late date, he were able to understand Marx. He does not understand him. What he means by the philosophy of science is the mechanistic materialism into which he was born.

¹ *New Introductory Lectures.*

² *Collected Papers.*

³ *New Introductory Lectures.*

Despite his opposition to any form of idealism, and to that of Jung and Adler in particular, it often appears that Freud is following in the wake of his two famous pupils. We shall have occasion to note one example in this chapter. This means that Freud is succumbing less quickly to the reactionary currents of imperialism than his younger confrères. Yet he does succumb. Even a casual examination of his thinking reveals his tendency to merge over into the idealism which he repudiates. Freud, says Osborn, "is a thoroughgoing and uncompromising materialist".¹ This is manifestly untrue. The assumption that ethical tendencies and primordial phantasies are inherited biologically cannot be thought by anyone who claims to be a Marxist to be anything but idealism.

There are now no irreconcilable class lines between mechanism and vitalism. Vitalism accepts the premises of mechanism, but attempts to resolve its difficulties by the addition of a vital force. The two are related to each other as liberal capitalism is to imperialism. Just as imperialism is unable to overcome the contradictions of liberal capitalism, but raises them to a higher plane, so vitalism, while ostensibly repudiating mechanism, only carries it to its logical conclusion. Only the proletarian revolution can overcome the antagonisms of capitalism and only the philosophy of that revolution can overcome mechanism in a progressive way.

It is Freud's transition to vitalism under the impact of the world war which we must now trace.

Freud's reaction to the outbreak of the war, although hardly a proletarian one, appears commendable beside the treachery exhibited by some who professed to be Marxists and revolutionaries. His response was the utter disillusionment of the liberal who had been blind to the imperialistic developments proceeding beneath an apparently peaceful surface. The "internationalism" of the world market and the consequent "fellowship" of scientists of every nationality seemed to assure peace to the world. Freud

¹ *Freud and Marx.*

confesses that he suffered from this illusion. There were warnings, he says, that "wars were unavoidable, even among the members of a fellowship such as this. We refused to believe it; . . . Then the war in which we had refused to believe broke out, and brought . . . disillusionment."¹

He observed with dismay the spectacle of impartial scientists rushing to the defence of their bourgeoisie with "new" theories purporting to demonstrate the moral, cultural and intellectual inferiority of the enemy. His sympathies were, understandably, with his kin who were fighting against the allies, but his intellect would not permit him to say that they were in the right. "We live," he wrote, "in the hope that the impartial decision of history will furnish the proof that precisely this nation, this in whose tongue we now write, this for whose victory our dear ones are fighting, was the one which least transgressed the laws of civilization . . . but at such a time who shall dare present himself as the judge of his own cause?"²

If Freud did not become a hero, at least he did not disgrace himself by any complete loss of equilibrium nor shameful irresponsibility. He simply did not understand. He could hardly believe what he saw. *The war did not fit into the Freudian theory.* It is in relation to this important fact that the further development of Freud's thinking has taken place.

Freud had commenced with an assumption which was common to almost all bourgeois social and biological theories. He had assumed that human beings, in common with all other forms of life, were characterized by two innate urges; to preserve the self and to preserve and increase the species. He had accordingly divided the instincts of man into two main groups, the "ego-instincts" leading to self-preservation and the sexual instincts. ". . . we thought," he says, "we had firmly grasped not

¹ *Collected Papers.*

² *Ibid.*

only the difference between the two groups of instincts, but the conflict between them."¹

Then came the war and confronted psychoanalytic theory with such a mass demonstration of self-destruction and race-destruction as had never been seen before. Hundreds of phenomena occurred in which there appeared to be an "overthrow . . . of that instinct which constrains every living thing to life".² In the face of such a difficulty, Freud did not even attempt to explain to himself the *outbreak* of the war. He contented himself with trying to understand how people could be persuaded to go to war once it had broken out.

Even here there were difficulties enough. Although the instinctive repertoire included egoistic impulses and sadistic components of the sexual instinct, they were hardly sufficient as they had previously been described to account for the behaviour which the war called forth. Freud was forced to begin to emphasize the "bad" side of what he believed to be human nature. " . . . I mean," he said, "that in this way we are led to regard human nature as 'better' than it actually is."³ In the course of individual development these "bad" impulses are transmuted into good ones, the selfish into the altruistic, the anti-social into the social. As we know, however, certain experiences are capable of undoing the civilizing work and regression occurs to the infantile impulses. "Undoubtedly," said Freud, "the influences of war are among the forces that can bring about such regression."⁴

But how comes the war in the first place? Freud has been tacitly assuming that somehow war comes from the outside, that it is not explicable in terms of psychology. He begins to require a reference to an entity which apparently acts by laws different from those of applied psychology. This he calls the "state". "The warring state," he says, "permits itself every such misdeed, every such act of

¹ *New Introductory Lectures.*

² *Collected Papers.*

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.*

violence, as would disgrace the individual man.”¹ If the state were nothing but the sum total of a number of isolated individuals this contrast would be impossible. It is at this point, for the first and last time, that he seems to perceive social forces as something different from applied psychology. But in what distorted form!

Freud’s tentative explanation, instead of overcoming the isolated man theory, carries this explanation to such a preposterous point that it is in conflict with the main tenets of psychoanalysis itself. We have noted several references to the idea that the individual recapitulates in his development the development of the race. Now Freud suggests to himself; “Perhaps they” (the states) “are reproducing the course of individual evolution, and still to-day represent very primitive phases in the organization and formation of higher unities.”² Thus, individual men become civilized far in advance of their civilization!

This careless suggestion, while the ultimate in individualistic interpretations, could hardly be taken seriously by Freud himself and he never mentions it again. It is only indicative of the utter helplessness of the Freudian theory to explain the world’s most important social and psychological phenomena. In a calmer moment, Freud admits this. “Actually why the national units should disdain, detest, abhor one another and that even when they are at peace, is indeed a mystery. I cannot tell why it is.”³

Clearly the phenomena of the war could not be explained in terms of any urge toward life nor even in terms of the sadistic components of sex. *What was needed was a non-erotic aggressive instinct.* Bearing this in mind for a moment, let us consider briefly the formal side of the development of the instinct theory.

The sexual and the ego instincts were, as we have seen, thought to be separate. Further study, particularly of

¹ *Collected Papers.*

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*

schizophrenia, revealed that in early infancy, no love, no libido is directed toward other people. It is centred upon the self. It is narcissistic. At that time, there is no distinction between the energy which will later be used to reproduce the race and that which is employed in preserving the individual. *Self-love* is precisely the unity of the ego and sexual instincts. The love that is directed toward the self can flow outward to objects and can also flow back again to the ego. "Object libido was at first ego-libido and can be again transformed into ego-libido."¹ "But if this is so," Freud says, "the two cannot differ from each other in their nature, and there is no point in distinguishing the energy of the one from that of the other; one can either drop the term 'libido' altogether, or use it as meaning the same as psychic energy in general."²

At this point Freud may be observed following Jung rapidly into vitalism by the postulation within the individual of "psychic energy in general". The story is complicated however by the fact in which we are particularly interested, the need for a non-erotic aggressive urge.

Both the sexual and the ego instincts, now merged into the life instinct, sought pleasure and avoidance of pain. But several phenomena did not harmonize easily with this "pleasure principle". This was true even of the central situation of every analysis in which the patient, by transferring his infantile emotions to the analyst, reinstates an earlier and repressed situation. "It has always surprised us," said Freud, "that the forgotten and repressed experiences of early childhood should reproduce themselves in dreams and reactions during analytic treatment, especially in the reactions involved in the transference, although their reawakening runs counter to the interests of the pleasure principle."³

¹ *Collected Papers.*

² *New Introductory Lectures.*

³ *Ibid.*

Added to this were "war dreams" in which soldiers repeated in phantasy terrifying and exceedingly painful experiences on the battlefield. These could not be explained as "wish-fulfilment" in the sense demanded by the pleasure principle.

These considerations, combined with others like masochism and sadism which "are very hard to account for by the theory of the libido",¹ led to the postulation of an innate tendency in all living things to reinstate a previous condition of existence even in opposition to pleasure. In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* Freud formulated this conception which was destined to attain dominant importance in his own mind, if not in that of some of his leading adherents.

"If it is true," he says, "that once in an inconceivably remote past, and in an unimaginable way, life arose out of inanimate matter, then, in accordance with our hypothesis, an instinct must at that time have come into being, whose aim it was to abolish life once more and to re-establish the inorganic state of things. If in this instinct we recognize the impulse to self-destruction of our hypothesis, then we can regard that impulse as the manifestation of a *death instinct* which can never be absent in any vital process."²

Freud's new instinct theory then presumes two main urges, one toward the preservation of the self and the race called the Life instinct the other directed primarily against the self called the Death instinct. "The co-operation and opposition of these two forces produce the phenomena of life to which death puts an end."³

What has all this to do with the war? Simply this: the death instinct is directed in the first place against the self. Such a self-destructive tendency is opposed to the self-preservative instinct so that under the influence of the latter, the death instinct is deflected from the self

¹ *New Introductory Lectures.*

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*

toward the outside world. Once this has occurred, we may have aggressive sexual behaviour or sadism, but we may also have, and this is the point, non-erotic aggression. Such aggression is in fact the "derivative and main representative of the death instinct".¹

Here then is the basis for a psychoanalytic explanation of the war and other violent social phenomena. We are now in possession of social units whose "neighbour is to them not only a possible helper or sexual object, but also a temptation to them to gratify their aggressiveness on him, to exploit his capacity for work without recompense, to use him sexually without his consent, to seize his possessions, to humiliate him, to cause him pain, to torture and kill him".

Freud would seem to attribute war to the improvement of weapons. "I really believe," he says, "that gun-powder and fire-arms overthrew chivalry and the domination of the aristocracy. . . ." ² Russian Tsarism succumbed to dynamite and the world war was inevitable once a German zeppelin showed it was capable of flying to London. But weapons do not fight wars by themselves. They require men to wield them. At this point, the new abstract man, equipped with all the necessary "natural" qualities steps into the breach. For "men always place their newly won powers at the service of their aggressiveness, and use them against one another".³ Thus all the horrors of imperialism, including war, can be referred without hesitation to the new abstract individuals. What was once bewildering has now become childishly simple!

Ostensibly, the theory of the death instinct arose as a result of theoretical considerations supported by biology. Freud says: ". . . it is not on account of the teaching of history and of our own experience of life that we maintain the hypothesis of a special instinct of aggression and

¹ *Civilization and Its Discontents* (Hogarth Press).

² *Ibid.*

³ *New Introductory Lectures.*

⁴ *Ibid.*

destructiveness in man, but on account of general considerations to which we were led in trying to estimate the importance of the phenomena of *sadism* and *masochism*.”¹

However, the formal development of the theory depends upon phenomena which have been in existence for years without forcing any such conclusion. The new instinct theory is for the most part simply a new interpretation of old facts. Viewed as the product of “theoretical considerations supported by biology”, the reason for this reinterpretation is obscure. Freud expresses his astonishment. “I can no longer understand,” he says, “how we could have overlooked the universality of non-erotic aggression and destruction and could have omitted to give it its due significance in our interpretation of life. . . .”²

If it is difficult to see why the instinct was overlooked before the war, it is not surprising that it should be discovered afterwards. As a matter of fact, it was definitely foreshadowed the year before the war. In an essay of 1913, Freud speaks of a “general instinct of mastery which when we find it serving the sexual function we call *sadism*”,³ and in the same essay, “hate is the forerunner of love”.⁴ The clear formulation of the death instinct as an immutable feature of human nature is the most characteristic theoretical product, not of “general considerations”, but of the general crisis of capitalism.

It is easy to see that Freud, the bewildered liberal, has only changed from one illusion, that war was no longer possible, to another illusion, that it can never be abolished. The bourgeois intellectual, thinking that his theories are based upon purely theoretical considerations, does nothing but reflect the latest tendencies of the bourgeoisie and then represents them as eternal concomitants of human nature.

¹ *New Introductory Lectures.*

² *Civilization and Its Discontents.*

³ *Collected Papers.*

⁴ *Ibid.*

The conviction that bourgeois characteristics are eternal is enough to drive any sensitive person to despair, and Freud has certainly become gloomy. On the basis of this death instinct, he has once more placed society in a dilemma.

We will remember that the severity of the superego toward the ego, producing an unconscious need for punishment and a conscious sense of guilt, arises because the child turns against himself the unacknowledged jealous hostility felt towards his father. This hostility may now be regarded as a manifestation of the death instinct. If this death instinct cannot be turned outwards, it must return against the ego. The more the child refrains from aggression toward others, the more the repressed hostility will be directed against himself. The sense of guilt is not the consequence of the uncontrolled *release* of aggression, but of its *repression*. The paradox is illustrated by the saint or the New Englander whose conscience is severe in direct proportion to the purity of his life. The suppression of unsaintly acts does not ease the conscience, does not assure his conscience that he is leading a good life. The suppression results in his turning these impulses against himself and consequently in an increasing sense of guilt.

If society should succeed in suppressing our "innate" aggressiveness against other human beings, as it must certainly do if it is to survive, the hostility will be turned back against each individual, thereby increasing humanity's sense of guilt unbearably. "If civilization," says Freud, "is the inevitable course of development from the group of the family to the group of humanity as a whole, then an intensification of the sense of guilt, resulting from the innate conflict of ambivalence, from the eternal struggle between the love and the death trends, will be inextricably bound up with it until perhaps the sense of guilt will swell to a magnitude that individuals can hardly support."¹

¹ *Civilization and Its Discontents.*

This is a horrible prospect, but the alternative—that of allowing the aggressive instincts free play—is equally dangerous. Aggressiveness must be suppressed, for “civilized society is perpetually menaced with disintegration through the primary hostility of men towards one another”.¹

This is indeed a dilemma. In order to avoid an unbearable sense of guilt, people must eternally hate, torture and kill other people, and this with increasingly deadly weapons. Freud does not believe that the Soviets have solved the problem. They are, he says, avoiding the sense of guilt by their implacable hostility to their bourgeoisie. But, he adds, “one only wonders with some concern how the Soviets will manage when they have exterminated their bourgeoisie entirely”.² We may justly infer that Freud’s concern is not wholly for the unfortunate people of the Soviet Union whose sense of guilt will threaten to increase intolerably. It is a simple reflection of the German bourgeois propaganda that the Soviets are preparing to attack *them*! Freud simply supplies the explanation.

Is there no outlet? Surely Freud does not conceive of an instinct as so rigid that the aggressive instinct can find no other expression but that of injuring other men. Formerly, Freud saw all mental life as the transformation of instincts or, at least, of their mental representatives. The mode of attaining satisfaction and the object which satisfied were in the highest degree changeable. “The relations of an instinct to its aim and to its object are also susceptible to alterations; both can be exchanged for others, but the relation to the object is the more easily loosened of the two.”³

Yet with regard to the death instinct, we are led to believe that nothing but the exploitation, torture and killing of other human beings will satisfy it. The man who formerly could see in an apparently harmless

¹ *Civilization and Its Discontents.*

² *Ibid.*

³ *New Introductory Lectures.*

collecting mania, manifestations of the sexual instinct, now cannot think of any way in which to divert the death instinct in order to prevent the destruction of civilization. In this regard, he is at one with other representatives of the bourgeoisie who, fearing the destruction of their civilization in war, cannot see any way to prevent it.

Even if we were to admit as an immutable part of human nature such a destructive impulse, it would not be difficult to suggest ways of sublimating it into harmless activities. We would not even have to go beyond the petty-bourgeois mentality in order to do so. The present and future Soviets might develop huge hunting preserves, organize mass tree-felling contests, or, if men must hate men, invent imaginary moon-men in order to stave off the tidal wave of guilt. This last plan has already been suggested. To quote R. Palme Dutt: "So deeply embedded is this competitive anti-collective assumption in the bourgeois outlook as the natural, eternal law of life, that certain imaginative writers of the bourgeoisie, such as André Maurois in a recent work, have elaborated phantasies to show that world federation could only be achieved by inventing a common enemy—in the case of this particular work of fiction, a supposed expedition for war against the moon."¹

Freud will not admit any such absurdities. He is not expressing the phantasies of the petty-bourgeois. He is expressing the fact that the imperialist bourgeoisie must use violence against other men. Imperialism cannot solve its problems by hating the moon-men or by felling trees and shooting ducks. Imperialism drives inexorably to war. There is no other solution for the imperialists. The instinct therefore, to which Freud attributes this drive, must be equally rigid. In a word, Freud is here speaking from the viewpoint of the imperialist bourgeoisie.

¹ R. P. Dutt, *World Politics* (Victor Gollancz).

Reflecting monopoly capitalism as he formerly reflected liberal capitalism, Freud makes the complete transition to vitalism. He has here postulated in its most pristine idealistic form, an inborn immutable force, pushing its way in a definite predetermined direction and incapable of being transformed. It can only be suppressed and turned against the ego. It is an "innate, independent, instinctual disposition to aggression".¹ It is an entelechy of the most inflexible kind. Nor shall we allow Freud to put us off with modest apologies. Instincts, he says, are "our Mythology", "superb in their indefiniteness".² On the contrary, the death instinct is nothing if it is not definite. It is precisely this definiteness, this rigidity, which distinguishes it from the older pre-imperialist instincts.

Freud takes still one more step down the easy path to mysticism previously trod by Jung. He assumes not only the Life instinct and the Death instinct, but also a "neutral" energy which is displaceable and "able to join forces either with an erotic or with a destructive impulse, differing qualitatively as they do. . . ." "Without assuming the existence of a displaceable energy of this kind," says Freud, "we can make no headway. The only question is where it comes from, what it belongs to and what it signifies."³

These questions can be answered without hesitation. The energy comes from God, it belongs to theology, and it signifies that Freud, the implacable materialist, has been forced under pressure of imperialism and the logic of his own mechanism to make the complete transition to philosophical idealism. We will let the bourgeois critics argue as to whether the Life instinct is sexual or not, if the Death instinct is directed primarily toward the self or the external world, and whether the "neutral" energy is in fact neutral. The real criticism against these instincts is not

¹ *Civilization and Its Discontents.*

² *New Introductory Lectures.*

³ *Civilization and Its Discontents.*

that they do not have the particular qualities which Freud ascribes to them, but that they do not exist at all.

At its present stage of development, psychology must postulate some concept of force. But there are two fundamentally different conceptions of force. One is necessarily an entelechy, a vitalistic force. The other takes into account the dialectical character of phenomena. The difference arises from the way in which the nature, intensity and direction of the force are conceived to be determined.

An entelechy is thought to be determined in advance by the nature of human beings. Its character is determined within the isolated individual. It proceeds in directions which cannot essentially be affected by the environmental conditions. An entelechy is a predisposition to do certain things independently of the milieu. Such are the instincts postulated by Freud.

The forces which we must assume in psychology are determined in quite another way. Their nature, intensity and direction cannot be derived from the isolated organism, but are contingent upon the complex inter-relations of which the organism is only a subordinate part. This is what Marx and Engels meant when they spoke to the bourgeois of his "will, whose essential character and direction are determined by the economical conditions of existence of your class".¹ The field of relations in which the organism exists is constantly changing; the inter-relations upon which the inner force depends are in continual motion. Therefore the force is not, like Freud's entelechies, a constant static thing, but rather a "transient form of behaviour".²

An entelechy like the Death instinct is only an abstraction from the behaviour of human beings under certain

¹ *Communist Manifesto*, see E. Burns, *Handbook of Marxism*.

² Kornilov, "Psychology in the Light of Dialectical Materialism," see Murchison, *Psychologies of 1930*.

definite conditions, in this case from human beings "in captivity" as Frankwood Williams put it.¹ This force, this behaviour cannot exist apart from the conditions which create it. The Death instinct is an abstraction from the behaviour of certain human beings under conditions of imperialist decay and war. This behaviour cannot be lifted from context, treated as an independent entity and pinned upon human beings as a sign of an immutable animal nature. When Osborn says that psychoanalysis is "the science dealing with the desires and urges characteristic of *man*",² he himself falls into the worst sort of idealism. There are no desires and urges characteristic of "man" under all conditions. The desires and urges of man change with the development of society. Osborn does not seem to have been sufficiently impressed by Marx's statement that "the human essence is no abstraction inherent in each single individual. In its reality, it is the *ensemble* of the social relations".³

In spite of its reactionary and idealistic form, however, Freud's recognition in human beings to-day of a tendency toward death is actually an advance. His proof that there exist in certain human beings strong impulses to self-destruction, that there can be in living beings "an overthrow, psychologically very remarkable, of that instinct which constrains every living thing to cling to life",⁴ shows beyond question that the impulses of human beings are not theirs "by nature", but are bound up with and depend upon the conditions in which they act. Even the old modest statement about human nature, that it was urged by a desire to preserve itself and to reproduce its kind, can no longer be maintained. Such urges depend upon conditions. Such urges may or may not motivate human behaviour. They may be overthrown and supplanted by opposite urges. Or both may act together at

¹ *Russia, Youth and the Present-Day World*, p. 147.

² Osborn, *Freud and Marx*.

³ Marx, *Theses on Feuerbach*, VI.

⁴ *Collected Papers*.

one and the same time depending upon the circumstances. With this demonstration, it becomes impossible to postulate any urges within the human being which are not contingent upon the social environment. The individual can no longer be separated from his social context.

Freud does not see that his advance destroys the validity of vitalistic urges. For him it only seems that he has added one more urge to the time-honoured ones. If he understood the transient and conditional nature of his instincts, he would be forced to understand the transient and conditional nature of the social order in which they have their being. In other words, he would have no longer to remain a bourgeois thinker, but become a Marxist. This he has been unable to do.

At the end of one of his most pessimistic essays, Freud expresses the hope that somehow, for some unknown reason, the forces of the Life instinct or Eros will assert themselves and change the otherwise hopeless outlook. But he can give no reasons to justify this hope. It remains with him only another mode of expression of his despair.

Yet his reasonless hope is closer to the truth than his logical pessimism. "Life will assert itself," said Lenin. And it is asserting itself against the forces which aim to destroy civilization and turn the clock back to an age of barbarism. But the forces bringing the future cannot be assimilated to Freud's mysterious Eros. The progressive, life-seeking tendencies are to be rationally understood as the necessary outcome of the total social movement. The triumph of life over death, the destruction of imperialism and the building of socialism cannot be traced to an immutable and inexplicable urge for life in isolated men. The urge for life exists, it is true, but it grows out of the material conditions of existence of the working class and its allies. These material conditions create the necessity, the desire and the power to overthrow the rotting structure which produces also, especially in

the bourgeoisie, the self-destructive urges which Freud has detected.

In order to understand the conflicting urges of men to-day, it is necessary first to understand the complex social relationships involved in the movement of society as a whole through a period of social revolution.

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